

NATIONAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING RESEARCH PROGRAM

RESEARCH REPORT

Entry to vocations: strengthening VET in Schools

Kira Clarke

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE



Australian Government
Department of Industry



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About the research

Entry to vocations: strengthening VET in Schools

Kira Clarke, Education Policy and Leadership, University of Melbourne

This report is part of a wider three-year program of research, *Vocations: the link between post-compulsory education and the labour market*, which is investigating the educational and occupational paths that people take and examining how their study relates to their work. It is specifically interested in exploring how to strengthen the role of VET in Schools (VETiS) so that it leads to a viable post-school pathway. It builds upon previous research by the author, which argued the need for VET in Schools to be reconceptualised such that it provides a clear pathway to post-school vocational education and training (VET) rather than direct entry to the workforce.

The findings from the previous research were used as a basis for roundtable discussions with VET in Schools stakeholders, including representatives from education and training authorities, boards of studies, public and private registered training organisations, group training organisations, schools and industry and skills advisory bodies. Of particular interest was finding out why VET in Schools is currently not providing strong employment and further study outcomes for students and how it can be strengthened.

Key messages

- The roundtable discussions indicate that VET in Schools is perceived as having a range of objectives, offering everything from a ‘taster’ of future workforce opportunities, to a linear pathway to mid-level skilled employment. The author argues that these diverse perceptions are limiting the effectiveness of VET in Schools as a pathway to post-secondary vocational qualifications.
- Particular challenges for VET in Schools as a direct pathway to employment include the difficulty of properly integrating VET with school subjects, and limited access to workplace learning or industry experience.
- If the main objective is a pathway to post-secondary education, then other factors raised in discussions that might strengthen VET in Schools include:
 - using VET in Schools as a foundational pathway to further VET study following school and creating synergy between vocational learning in schools and the vocational options available to students post school
 - having a purpose-built school-based vocational curriculum rather than one based on Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualifications to bring it in line with the broader preparatory role of the senior school certificate
 - integrating vocational and career learning with the general disciplinary school curriculum so that students undertake a complementary stream of study
 - providing a clearer role for employers and industry in the development of vocational programs in schools.

Contents

Figures	6
Executive summary	7
Introduction	11
A 'programmatic' approach to VET in Schools	12
Report outline	13
The context for the discussion	14
VET in Schools as part of the broader role of VET for 15 to 19-year-olds	14
VET in Schools skills and qualifications in the labour market	16
Workplace exposure and stakeholder relationships	17
Methodology	17
Key findings from the roundtables	19
The purpose of VET in Schools	19
Architecture of VET in Schools	20
Applied disciplinary knowledge	22
Relationships and communication between stakeholders	22
A 'programmatic' approach	23
Looking forward	26
How could VET in Schools be strengthened?	26
References	28
Appendix A - Roundtable participants	29
Appendix B - Entry to vocations: year 2 discussion paper	34
Entry to the vocations: a discussion paper on strengthening VET in Schools	34
NVETR Program funding	42

Figures

Figures

1	Number of VET in Schools students 2007–11, by state (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia)	11
2	Estimate of participation of Australians, aged 16, in education and training, by education and training activity, August 2009	14
3	VET in Schools and VET participation of 15 to 19-year-olds (excluding school completers), by state and AQF level, 2010	15
4	VET in Schools fields of education, 15 to 19-year-olds in VET in Schools, 2010	17

Appendix

A1	VET in Schools and VET participation of 15 to 19-year-olds (excluding school completers), by state and AQF level, 2010	35
A2	VET in Schools fields of education, 15 to 19-year-olds in VET in Schools, 2010	38
A3	AQF level participation and course completions by SES quintiles, 15 to 19-year-olds in VET in Schools, 2009	40

Executive summary

As part of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research's consortium research program, *Vocations: the link between post-compulsory education and the labour market*, the Education Policy and Leadership unit at the University of Melbourne is conducting research for the strand 'Entry to vocations' – how to improve occupational and further study outcomes from entry-level vocational education and training (VET). The key research question being addressed is: What are the main variables shaping the relationship between VET, employment and occupations at the entry-level? Entry-level VET encompasses certificate levels I and II and all vocational education and training completed through VET in Schools (VETiS) as part of a senior secondary certificate, which in limited instances includes certificate III and above. Nationally, students studying entry-level qualifications make up more than one in five of all VET students (NCVER 2011b). This study is particularly interested in VET in Schools.

This report draws together findings from the second year of this research, conducted during 2012. In the second year of the research the hypothesis is that VET in Schools in its current forms is not a strong model for preparing students for employment or further study. This hypothesis stems from the findings from the first year of the research program (see Clarke & Volkoff 2012; Clarke). During the first year of this study, the researchers conducted consultations with VET in Schools policy-makers and undertook case studies of four models of VET in Schools, one each from Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland (see Clarke & Volkoff 2012; Clarke 2012). For the second year, the research asks two key questions:

- Why is VET in Schools not providing strong employment and further study outcomes for students?
- How can VET in Schools be strengthened?

Methodology

Within the context of the two key research questions, year two of this research was not intended as a system comparison but rather was aimed at teasing out the common conceptual and logistical dilemmas of VET in Schools. The research team conducted a series of half-day roundtables with VET in Schools stakeholders in Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia. These roundtables brought together stakeholders from education and training authorities, boards of studies, public and private registered training organisations (RTOs), group training organisations (GTOs), schools from all three sectors (public, Catholic and independent) and representatives of peak industry and skills advisory bodies (n = 138). Additional consultations were also conducted with VET in Schools stakeholders from industry, including representatives from industry training advisory bodies (ITABs) and industry skills councils (ISCs). To facilitate stakeholder discussion at these roundtables, a discussion paper was prepared and disseminated to all roundtable participants (see appendix B). This discussion paper drew on findings from the first year of the 'Entry to vocations' research and sought to highlight the challenges and weaknesses in current approaches to VET in Schools.

Key findings from the roundtables

Purpose of VET in Schools

VET in Schools was described by stakeholders as currently performing many and varied roles. While there was a lack of consensus regarding the effectiveness with which current models could achieve success in these various roles, there was agreement that current models of provision were not creating strong pathways to employment, particularly full-time employment and/or employment requiring intermediate or mid-level skills. Some of the roles for VET in Schools commonly identified by participants included: an alternative way to complete school; career exploration; training for part-time work; a pathway to mid-level VET and tertiary study following school; a less demanding subject for those students taking predominantly academic senior secondary programs; a qualification for gaining employment following school; and a smoother transition to employment-based training.

Architecture of VET in Schools

In all five roundtables, there was critical discussion of the current structures of senior secondary certificates, particularly in relation to how VET in Schools was accommodated within those certificates. While the level of criticism of senior secondary certificates differed across the different states, there were several points of consensus. In light of career exploration being one of the perceived purposes of VET in Schools, there was concern that current models of VET in Schools, which are tied to school completion in the latter years of secondary schooling, provide limited opportunity for students to ‘taste’ and then change their mind, or taste a range of options and then select one for their primary focus.

One of the great structural challenges in developing effective approaches to vocational learning earlier in secondary schooling is that the current provision ties vocational learning to Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualifications and senior secondary units of study. This in turn ties participation in those qualifications to school completion. In contemplating earlier commencement of vocational learning, school-based stakeholders understandably expressed concern about the possibility of Year 8 students commencing their senior secondary studies at such a young age. If serious consideration is to be given to more coherent and explicit models of vocational learning in the junior years of secondary school, an approach will be needed which does not rely on current VET in Schools models, which use senior secondary units of study as the sole framework for vocational learning.

Applied disciplinary learning

Stakeholders described an ongoing tension between the opening-up of senior secondary certificates for maximising access and completion for a broader range of young people and the simultaneous provision of a core body of knowledge that all senior secondary students were expected to access and attain. There was also concern that the opening-up of senior secondary education to greater levels of vocational learning meant a decrease in the focus on the disciplinary learning needed to support post-school education and training. This was a view more commonly held in South Australia, Queensland and Victoria, where it is possible for students to complete their senior secondary certificates through a predominantly vocational curriculum. A concern expressed amongst a significant minority of stakeholders from these states was that the focus of VET in Schools policy on retention has undermined the purpose and effectiveness of increased school completion in providing a basis for a positive post-school outcome (for example, pathways to employment-based training or higher-level vocational study, pathways to full-time employment in intermediate and above occupations). While

there was general consensus and acknowledgment that increased school completion was a good thing, the benefit of school completion was described as uneven and linked to the type of program or curriculum undertaken.

Relationships and communication between stakeholders

Despite the reliance of the VET in Schools model on inherently cross-sectoral cooperation and collaboration, it became clear through the stakeholder discussions that there continues to be a lack of awareness of the role, contribution and needs of other stakeholders on all sides. There was evident confusion among some stakeholders, not only about the role played by different stakeholders, but also about the structural and logistic requirements of the provision of VET in Schools. There was a strong consensus at all roundtables that better lines of communication and stronger relationships are needed to enhance the effectiveness of the inherently cross-sectoral models of VET in Schools.

A 'programmatic' approach to VET in Schools

A key objective of this second year of research was to test ideas for potentially strengthening VET in Schools. Findings from the first year indicated that a possible shift to a reconceptualised model of VET in Schools as a foundational stage of occupational preparation could produce effective post-school outcomes. Drawing on findings from the first year of the research program, the researchers developed some initial ideas around a 'programmatic' approach to VET in Schools. A programmatic approach was envisaged as one where there are closer links between the academic (disciplinary) and vocational (applied) curriculums in senior secondary education and a focus on the pathways from vocational learning in senior secondary school to vocational learning in apprenticeships for post-school VET providers. This means emphasising the foundational nature of VET in Schools as a pathway to higher-level vocational studies to support participation in and completion of post-school vocational qualifications. While system-level stakeholders indicated that VET in Schools was conceptualised in this foundational way in policy, school-level stakeholders suggested that this message was still missing in schools' approaches to and promotion of vocational programs.

This model or approach is centred on a conceptual shift away from what appear to be utilitarian or instrumentalist approaches, which see VET in Schools as providing a direct pathway to work, towards an approach that builds the skills and theoretical knowledge needed for entry to further higher-level vocational education and training and employment-based training. In order to gauge stakeholder responses to potential variations or structural changes to current models of VET in Schools, the researchers outlined these ideas during the roundtable discussion. They included: thematically linked subjects; industry-broad rather than occupationally specific knowledge-based curriculum; compulsory industry/workplace learning integrated with theoretical learning; and explicit links between VET in Schools curriculum and post-school VET. While VET in Schools in its current forms is *structurally* linked to the post-school VET landscape, stakeholders suggested more needed to be done to explicitly articulate these links to students and their families.

The researchers also sought to test the receptiveness of stakeholders to models of VET in Schools that may not include components of national training packages. The researchers were aware that this is a controversial idea, and stakeholders were initially very sceptical of the potential feasibility of a model not inherently linked to the broader VET sector and its standards and qualifications. In Queensland and New South Wales, two states with some of the largest participation in VET in Schools, several stakeholders were open to considering models not built around existing VET qualifications: they were aware of the declining currency of the entry-level (foundational) AQF qualifications more broadly and for 15 to 19-year-olds in particular. The openness of these stakeholders, from both school

and system backgrounds, is significant for the continuing discourse on strengthening, and finding new approaches to, vocational learning in schools.

Looking forward

The roundtable consultations highlighted the gap in the understanding, communication and synergy between the vocational learning in schools and the vocational options available to students post school and the need for a clearer role for VET providers in informing the pathway choices of young people.

Looking towards the third and final year of the ‘Entry to vocations’ research, the findings from the second year consultations provide an insight into ways by which VET in Schools might be strengthened. Firstly, in light of the data on poor employment outcomes for VET in Schools students (Department of Education and Training Queensland 2011; Rothman et al. 2011), VET in Schools could be strengthened through a stronger focus (at a policy and practice level) on its role as a foundational pathway to further training. Secondly, greater integration of vocational and career learning within the school curriculum could address VET provider and employer concerns that VET in Schools students are leaving secondary school without the requisite disciplinary knowledge to support their vocational skills and/or vocational learning at a higher level and without sufficient exposure to industry learning. With a possible shift to a focus on vocational education and training in the senior secondary years as a foundational pathway to further training (as described above), there is scope for discussion of a school-based VET curriculum not based on national training packages. The feedback from stakeholders suggested that VET in Schools, despite significant evidence of its weak job-preparation role, is still perceived in school communities as a suitable pathway for entry directly to work. A shift to an approach that focuses on the role of VET in Schools as preparing for further study, rather than employment, opens up space for considering other models or approaches to the vocational curriculum in schools, including models and approaches not necessarily tied to the national training packages.

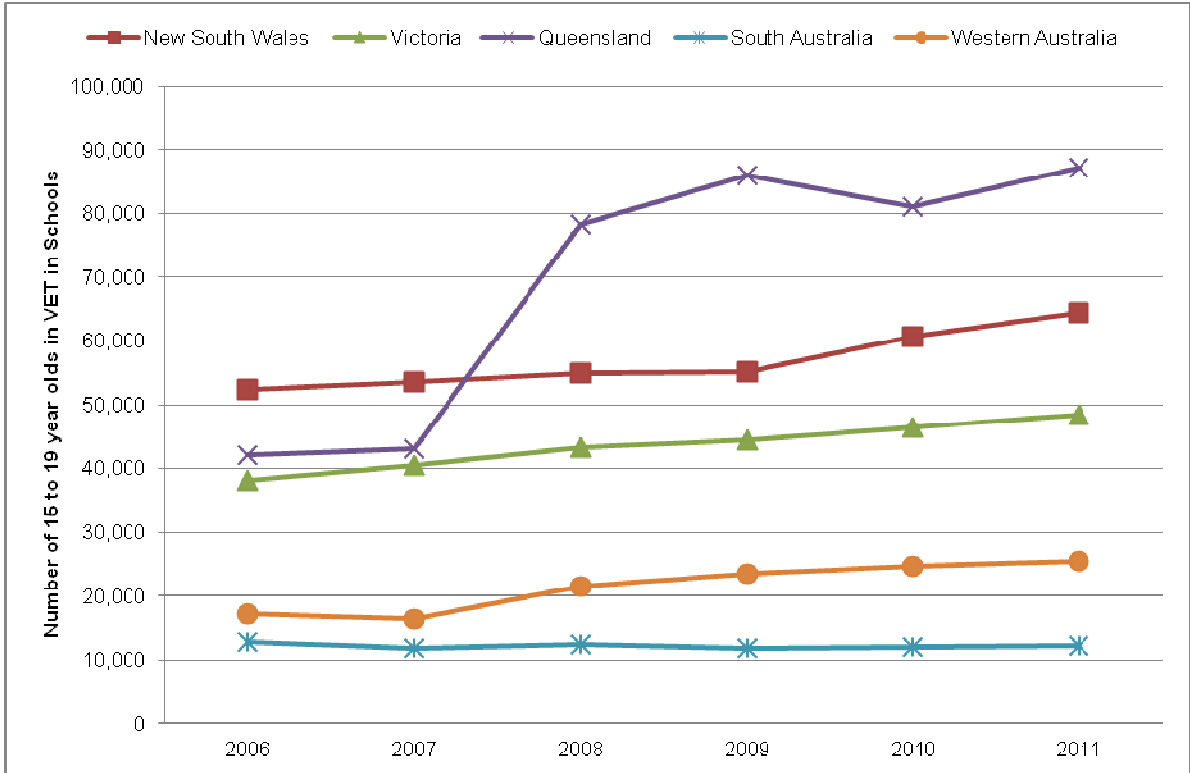
A purpose-built school-based vocational curriculum could strengthen VET in Schools by being more closely aligned to the broader preparatory role of the senior secondary certificates. A constant theme during the roundtables was the concern that VET in Schools students were not ‘job ready’, due both to a lack of exposure to workplaces and industry and the level of qualifications they had undertaken. A strategy that may address some of the concerns might be mapping out a clearer role for employers, and industry more broadly, in the development of vocational programs in schools. If a strengthened approach to VET in Schools is one in which there is a stronger focus on pathways to post-school training, there is a need for those pathways to be made more explicit.

Introduction

As part of the NCVET consortium research program, *Vocations: the link between post-compulsory education and the labour market*, the Education Policy and Leadership unit at the University of Melbourne is conducting research for the strand ‘Entry to vocations’. This strand is focused on how to improve occupational and further study outcomes from entry-level vocational education and training. The key research question being addressed is: What are the main variables shaping the relationship between vocational education and training, employment and occupations at the entry-level? Entry-level VET includes VET at certificate levels I and II and all VET completed through VET in Schools as part of a senior secondary certificate, which in limited instances includes certificate III and above. Nationally, students studying entry-level qualifications make up more than one in five of all VET students (NCVER 2011b). This study is interested in VET in Schools specifically.

Australian senior secondary students are participating in VET in Schools in increasing numbers (figure 1). Through VET in Schools programs, now accessible in all Australian states and territories, young people can choose to undertake programs that provide both competencies towards a nationally recognised qualification and credits towards the completion of their senior secondary certificate.

Figure 1 Number of VET in Schools students 2007–11 by state (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia)



Source: NCVET, VOCSTATS¹ (extracted 1/8/12).

¹ VOCSTATS is a SuperWEB product which allows users to construct their own tables via an interactive web interface, using databases containing data from various NCVET collections. The data selected are loaded as a SuperWEB table, allowing the user to manipulate the table to customise it for their own use. Tables can then be printed or exported in a variety of formats <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats/intro.html>>.

This report draws together findings from the second year of this research, conducted during 2012. The research during this year follows two key questions:

- Why is VET in Schools not providing strong employment and further study outcomes for students?
- How can VET in Schools be strengthened?

The hypothesis going into year two, that VET in Schools in its current forms is not a strong model of employment or further study preparation, stems from the findings in this program of research so far. In the first year of this study, the researchers conducted consultations with VET in Schools policy-makers and case studies of four models of VET in Schools, one each from Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland (see Clarke & Volkoff 2012; Clarke 2012). A key focus of the year one research was identifying how current approaches to VET in Schools were located and supported within the architecture of the senior secondary certificates. While each system included in the year one research (note that Western Australia was added to the study for the second year and does not appear in year one data or reports) approached VET in Schools in different ways, common tensions and dilemmas were identified that constrained the effectiveness of VET in Schools as a pathway to work and higher-level study.

What emerged from the year one research was that the effectiveness of current models of VET in Schools is compromised by a lack of mutual understanding among key stakeholders, problematic relationships between VET in Schools programs and senior secondary certificate structures, and a lack of clarity regarding measures of success. Findings from the first year also indicated that within VET in Schools programs the relationships between education and work are weak. These weak relationships were described by interviewees as diminishing the effectiveness of current VET in Schools models as programs supporting transition to occupations. While some VET in Schools has excellent outcomes for pupils (for example, full-time apprenticeships and study at mid-level and higher VET), evidence from post-school tracking surveys and feedback from stakeholders as part of this research indicates that, for the majority of VET in Schools students, a vocational pathway through school does not enhance their post-school transition or provide a secure pathway to employment or further training. The inherently cross-sectoral nature of VET in Schools provision demands a congruent understanding among schools, employers, external training providers, school systems and representative bodies, which is currently lacking in most contexts. In addition to creating weak links to employment and occupations, the lack of mutual understanding among current VET in Schools stakeholders also constrains the transitions to post-school mid-level and higher VET. In year two, the researchers wanted to examine more closely why relationships between education and work are perceived as weak and identify how those relationships, in a VET in Schools context, could be strengthened.

A 'programmatic' approach to VET in Schools

In addition to seeking to understand the weaknesses of current approaches to VET in Schools, a key objective of the year two research was testing ideas for potentially strengthening VET in Schools. Findings from the first year indicated that a possible shift to a reconceptualised model of VET in Schools as a foundational or preparatory stage of occupational preparation could deliver effective post-school outcomes.

Drawing on findings from the first year of the research, the researchers developed some initial ideas associated with a 'programmatic' approach to VET in Schools. A programmatic approach was envisaged as one where there are closer links between the academic (disciplinary) and vocational

(applied) curriculums in senior secondary education and a focus on the pathways from vocational learning in senior secondary school to vocational learning in apprenticeships or post-school VET providers. Case studies conducted in South Australia and Queensland in the first year of this work (see Clarke 2012) provided models of programmatic or themed approaches to VET in Schools, where students engaged in a 'package' of subjects designed to enhance access to a post-school vocational outcome. In the discussion paper distributed to roundtable participants, the researchers, in addition to asking a series of discussion questions, also presented the programmatic approach to participants for their feedback and comment during the roundtable discussions.

Report outline

This report outlines the discussion emerging from the roundtable and industry consultations. The following section provides an overview of the current participation and policy context of VET in Schools, which formed the basis for the roundtable discussions.

The findings from the roundtables are structured around four key themes:

- the purpose of VET in Schools
- the architecture of VET in Schools
- the role of applied and disciplinary knowledge
- communication and relationships between different stakeholders.

The penultimate section of this report outlines the 'programmatic' approach to VET in Schools, which was tested with stakeholders during the roundtables.

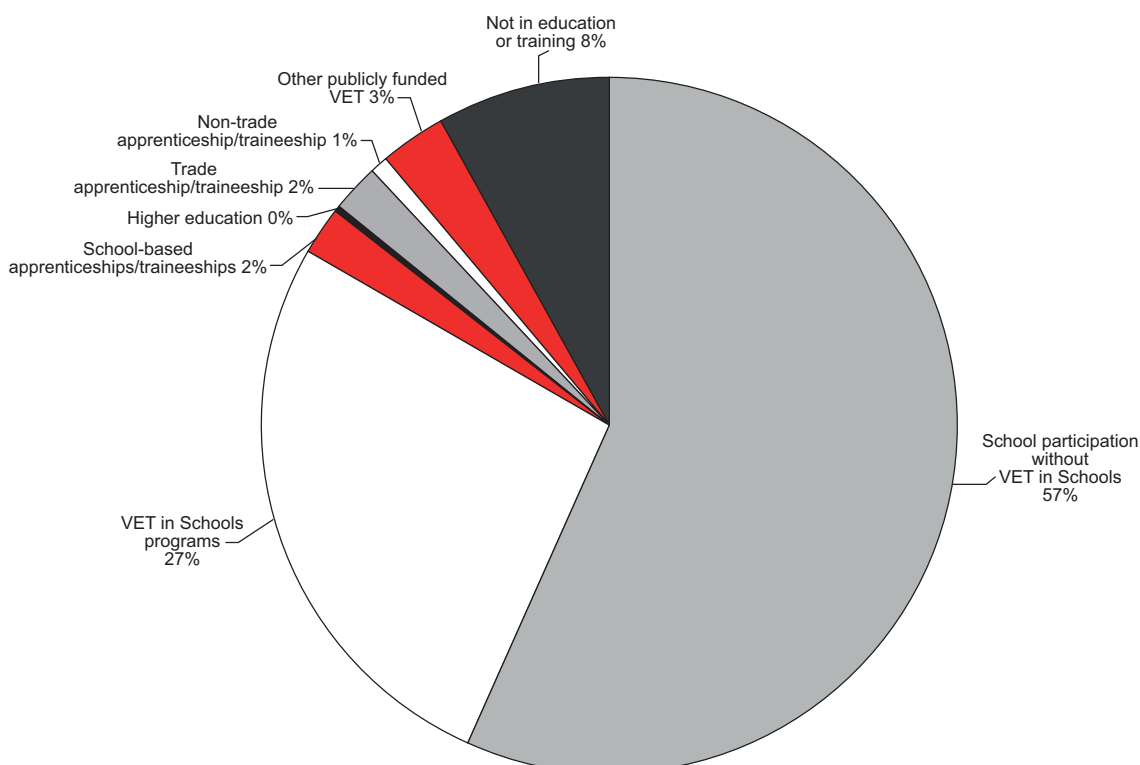
The context for the discussion

The findings from year one of the ‘Entry to vocations’ research formed the context for the discussions during the five roundtables conducted during the second year of the research program. This section draws together the key themes from the first year to set the scene for the year two consultations. Each theme leads to a discussion question that was put to participants during the roundtable.

VET in Schools as part of the broader role of VET for 15 to 19-year-olds

Interviewees consulted in year one raised concerns about the impact of the architectures of senior secondary certificates, and the place of VET in Schools within those architectures, in limiting the effectiveness of VET in Schools in providing pathways to occupations and higher-level training. They also highlighted the fact that VET in Schools is just one part of the broader role of vocational education and training for 15 to 19-year-olds. While the focus of the ‘Entry to vocations’ research is on the role of VET in Schools as a curriculum option to strengthen outcomes for all young people, it is important to note the limited role that VET in Schools is playing for the 15 to 19-year-old cohort overall. VET in Schools students and school-based apprentices and trainees account for only 14% of the total cohort of Australian 15 to 19-year-olds (Australian Curriculum, Reporting and Assessment Authority 2011). If we look at 16-year-olds, the age of the last year of compulsory schooling in most Australian states and territories, VET in Schools students and school-based apprentices and trainees make up only 27% of the age cohort (figure 2). Moreover, there are more than 161 000 young people aged between 15 and 19 years who have not completed a senior school certificate studying VET outside schools (for example, as early school leavers) (NCVER, VOCSTATS, extracted 1/8/12).

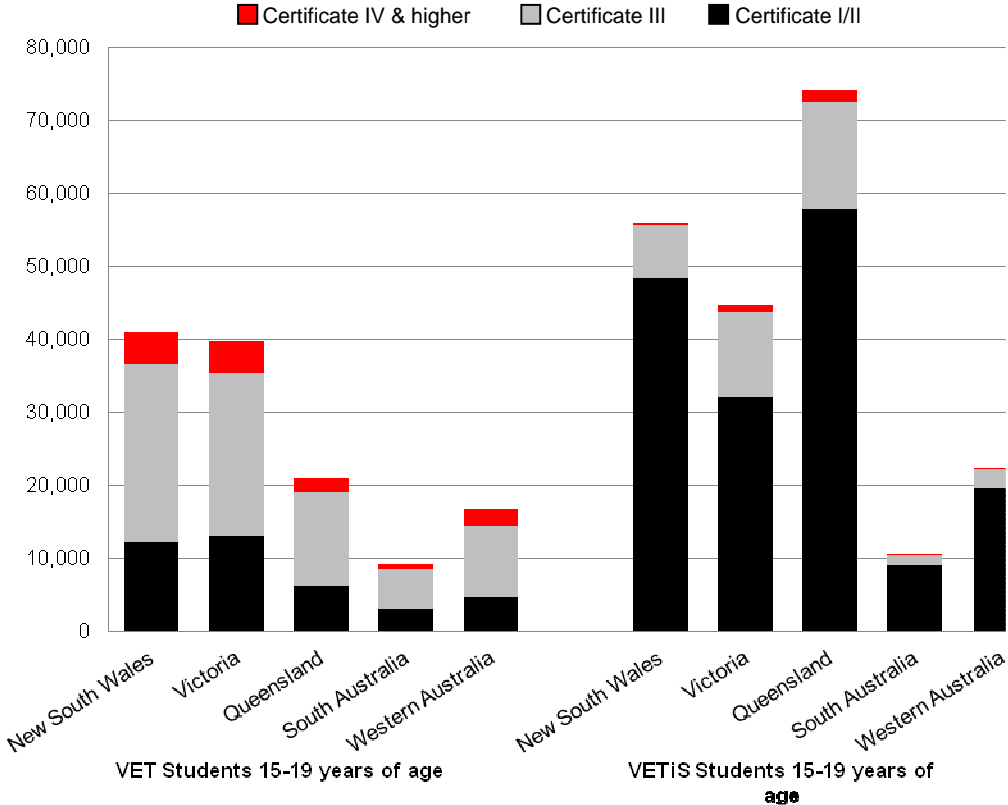
Figure 2 Estimate of participation of Australians, aged 16, in education and training, by education and training activity, August 2009



Source: Australian Curriculum, Reporting and Assessment Authority (2011)

If we focus solely on the VET activity of 15 to 19-year-olds and exclude those who have already completed school in the five jurisdictions consulted in year two of the research (Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia), we can see that VET in Schools students make up the majority of 15 to 19-year-olds in vocational education and training (figure 3). Queensland² stands out in this context, with the overwhelming majority of the 15 to 19-year-old participation in VET undertaken through VET in Schools. The representation of VET in Schools students in the broader 15 to 19-year-old VET cohort varies by system and by certificate level, with Queensland and Victoria having larger numbers of students undertaking training at certificate III and above.

Figure 3 VET in Schools and VET participation of 15 to 19-year-olds (excluding school completers), by state and AQF level, 2010



Note: Graph uses both Student and Courses and VET in Schools datasets.
 VET Students 15–19 years of age without Year 12 excludes those students still at school.
 Source: NCVER, VOCSTATS (extracted 1/8/12).

In seeking to enhance and strengthen the role of VET in Schools in securing ‘transition to a broad range of post-school options and pathways’ (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2000), consideration needs to be given to the capacity of VET in Schools programs to cater to the needs of the around 161 000 young people aged 15 to 19 years opting to forego school completion in pursuit of vocational study outside the senior secondary certificates (NCVER, VOCSTATS, extracted 1/8/12). Operating on the premise that young people should be completing school before embarking on further tertiary or vocational study, the participation of large numbers of 15 to 19-year-olds in non-school VET who have not completed a senior secondary certificate, as highlighted in figure 3, suggests that current arrangements for VET in Schools are not meeting their needs.

² Queensland has a high rate of VET in Schools participation, with more than 60% of school completers also completing a VET qualification (Department of Education Queensland 2012).

Queensland is the exception here, where there is a considerably lower number of early school leavers engaged in vocational education and training.

VET in Schools skills and qualifications in the labour market

The second key theme emerging from year one and underpinning the year two discussions is the role of the skills and qualifications obtained through VET in Schools in enhancing transition to employment. In today's labour market, a Year 12 or senior secondary certificate is no longer enough to provide access for school completers to employment other than to low-skilled and increasingly casualised jobs. While much has been said and written about the positive impact of VET in Schools on school retention (Nguyen 2010; Anlezark, Karmel & Ong 2006), if the retention is simply delaying direct entry to the labour market, the question must be asked: to what extent is staying on to complete school strengthening the opportunities and outcomes for VET in School students? What was observed during year one of the research is that the foundational nature of VET in Schools does not effectively support student transition directly into entry-level occupations. A key reason for this is the weak currency of entry-level certificates (that is, certificates I and II) in the Australian labour market.

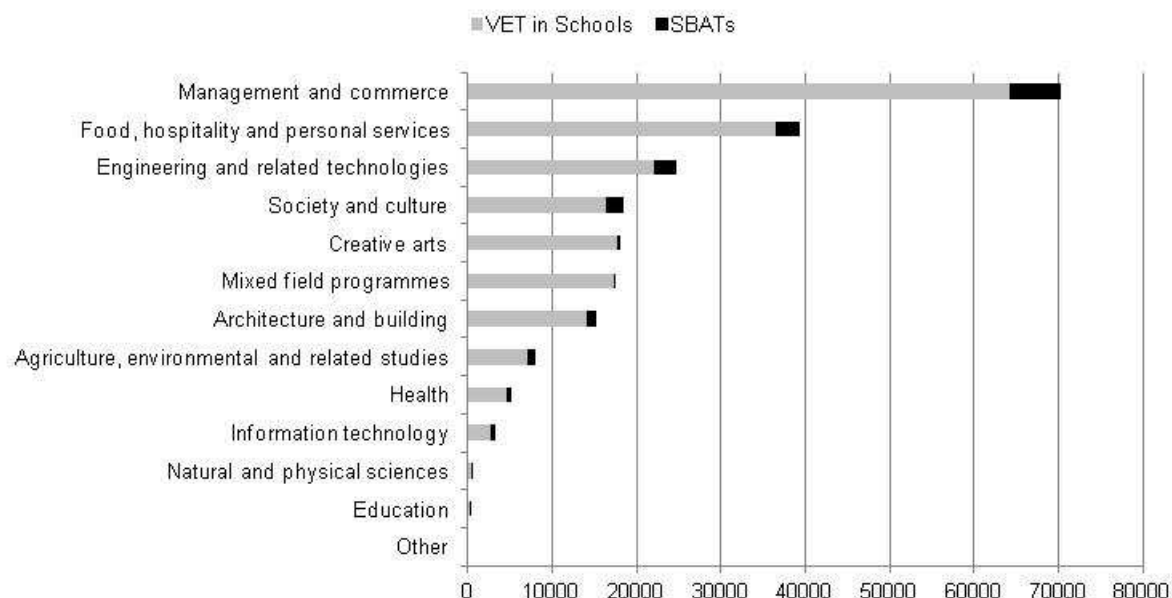
In this context of the declining currency of both Year 12 and entry-level VET certificates, school completers need access to post-school training in order to support effective labour market entry. Current mainstream models of VET in Schools provision examined during the first year of the research appear to lack the strong pathways to higher-level vocational education that support occupations requiring mid-level skills. These findings suggest there is a need to enhance and strengthen the role of VET in Schools as a pathway to post-school vocational education, including to both campus-based and employment-based training opportunities.

Currently, the industry areas attracting students to participate in VET in Schools are not always those where skill shortages and labour demands translate into strong opportunities for post-school training and employment. This was a key policy and practice tension identified by stakeholders in year one of the research. On the one hand, for VET in Schools to be an effective retention tool, the qualifications offered need to be attractive and interesting to students. Conversely, facilitating participation in study towards vocational qualifications observed as having limited post-school learning or employment potential undermines the purpose and benefits of school completion. As shown in figure 4, VET in Schools participation is concentrated in the management and commerce discipline area, of which around three-quarters constitutes participation at certificates I and II level in office studies. Participation in food, hospitality and personal services is similarly dominated by certificates I and II level study. Stakeholders consulted during year two of the research highlighted the importance of striking a balance between what students want to study and what provides the strongest outcomes. One of the dilemmas identified in current models was the occupationally specific nature of the available VET in Schools choices. Several interviewees suggested that vocational learning in senior secondary schooling need not be job-specific and, in contrast, could prepare students for a broadly defined occupation such as care work.

Along with strengthening pathways to post-school institutional or campus-based VET, a successful programmatic approach to VET in Schools also needs to strengthen entry to employment-based training. Evidence suggests that apprenticeship pathways are an effective option for VET in Schools students, particularly for young men (Karmel & Liu 2011). Figure 4 highlights the still-limited role being played by school-based apprenticeships and traineeships in all Australian states and territories. Feedback from stakeholders in year one of the research indicates that some school-based apprentices are precluded from entry to full-time post-school apprenticeships by employers because they have

reached stage two of their theoretical learning but have minimal industry experience. It was also suggested by some stakeholders that, even where substantial workplace learning had been included in VET in Schools programs, a perception still existed amongst employers that VET in Schools is ‘not real VET’.

Figure 4 VET in Schools fields of education, 15 to 19-year-olds in VET in Schools, 2010



Source: NCVET, VOCSTATS (extracted 1/8/12).

Workplace exposure and stakeholder relationships

A dilemma frequently identified during the first year of the research was the limited capacity in current models of VET in Schools to provide sufficient exposure to the workplace learning and industry exploration experiences necessary to support theoretical learning and develop sufficient understanding of the nature of a student’s chosen industry or occupation. This type of scepticism of VET in Schools in industry and some registered training organisations has been well documented (Polesel et al. 2004; Service Skills Australia 2010). During consultations in year one of this research, interviewees also identified a lack of understanding of VET in Schools amongst non-school stakeholders as limiting its effectiveness. Interviewees commonly identified a ‘lack of understanding and confidence in VET in Schools’, ‘training credentials not viewed positively’, ‘a perception from industry and some VET training institutions that VET in schools is not real VET’ as factors limiting the efficacy of VET in Schools as an employment pathway. In the second year, the researchers hoped to develop a deeper understanding of the cross-sectoral complexities of VET in Schools by including a broad range of stakeholders in each of the roundtables.

Methodology

Year two of this research was not intended as a system comparison but rather was aimed at teasing out the common conceptual and logistical dilemmas. The research team conducted a series of half-day roundtables with VET in Schools stakeholders in Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia. These roundtables, conducted during August 2012, brought together stakeholders from education and training authorities, boards of studies, public and private registered training organisations, group training organisations, schools from all three sectors (public,

Catholic and independent) and representatives of peak industry and skills advisory bodies (n = 138). (See appendix 1 for list of roundtable participants.) To facilitate stakeholder discussion at these roundtables, a paper was prepared and disseminated to all roundtable participants (see appendix B). This discussion paper drew on findings from the first year of the ‘Entry to vocations’ research and sought to highlight the challenges and weaknesses in current approaches to VET in Schools.

During September and October 2012, the researchers conducted additional and follow-up consultations with VET in Schools stakeholders from industry, including representatives from industry training advisory bodies and industry skills councils. These industry representatives also participated in the roundtables.

Through these roundtables and subsequent consultations, the researchers sought feedback in response to the following key questions:

- 1 Should the purpose of VET in Schools be to prepare students for direct entry to work, or should it be primarily to prepare students for post-school VET in either apprenticeships or institutionally based VET?
- 2 How can VET in Schools more effectively facilitate pathways to post-school VET?
- 3 Is the current architecture of VET in Schools, with a focus on job-specific learning, the most appropriate approach to vocational learning in the senior secondary years?
- 4 In seeking to ensure that all students have access to the disciplinary or applied disciplinary knowledge needed to support post-school education and training, is there a need to differentiate the provision of senior secondary discipline-based subjects? For example, the provision of streams within discipline-based subjects that are more explicitly related to technical and trade pathways.
- 5 In what ways can career guidance at a system and school level play a role in supporting transition to post-school VET?
- 6 Should formalised vocational learning be limited to the senior secondary years? Is there a need for increased vocational learning in the junior and middle years to inform and strengthen vocational pathways and VET in Schools choices?
- 7 How useful is the term ‘VET in Schools’ in encapsulating the vocational learning taking place in senior secondary schooling?

Year one of the ‘Entry to vocations’ research included case studies in four Australian jurisdictions (Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, and South Australia). In the second year of the research, Western Australia was included in the systems being examined. In order to develop an understanding of the West Australian system of VET in Schools, interviews were conducted with a small number (n = 3) of system-level VET in Schools stakeholders in Western Australia during April–May 2012.

Key findings from the roundtables

This section of the report details the four key themes emerging from the roundtable consultations. Each of the four sections here includes feedback from stakeholders regarding both the *why* and *how* aspects of this research (that is, why is VET in Schools not working well; how can VET in Schools be strengthened).

The purpose of VET in Schools

Before examining the perceived strengths and weaknesses of current models of VET in Schools, the researchers sought to develop a clearer picture of what stakeholders saw as the *purpose* of VET in Schools. Of key interest in this discussion is how the conceptualised purpose of VET in Schools relates to the broader purposes of senior secondary schooling. In other words, are the purposes of VET in Schools congruent with the broader educational purposes of senior secondary schooling?

In speaking to the different stakeholders through these roundtables it was evident that VET in Schools is currently performing many and varied roles. There was a lack of consensus regarding the effectiveness with which current models could achieve success in these various roles. Despite evidence tracking VET in Schools graduates in Queensland (Department of Education and Training Queensland 2010) and Victoria (Rothman et al. 2011) which suggests that outcomes for VET in Schools students continue to be weak by comparison with their non-VET in Schools peers, stakeholders at the roundtables were very vocal in their belief that VET in Schools should play a role in direct entry from school to work. However, there was agreement that current models of provision were not creating strong pathways to employment, particularly full-time employment and/or employment requiring intermediate or mid-level skills.

In seeking to understand the various roles that VET in Schools is performing, the researchers asked stakeholders to identify the purpose that VET in Schools was playing at both policy and practice levels. The roles that stakeholders indicated that a VET in Schools model should accommodate included:

- an alternative way to complete school (retention strategy)
- career exploration
- training for part-time work for future university students
- a pathway to mid-level VET and tertiary study following school
- a less demanding subject for those students taking predominantly academic senior secondary programs
- a qualification for gaining employment post school
- enhanced transition to employment-based training (for example, apprenticeships, traineeships, armed forces, police force).

Several stakeholders noted that the multiple roles that VET in Schools is expected to perform makes measuring the success of VET in Schools programs difficult, particularly at a systemic level. Several school representatives emphasised that at the school level the entrenched cultural expectations of the school community often shaped what was considered as success for their VET in Schools programs.

A lack of an effective means of measuring the outcomes of VET in Schools was described as one factor limiting the capacity for the targeted improvement of VET in Schools programs.

Despite support for VET in Schools to play many and varied roles for young people, there appeared in some instances to be a disconnect between what stakeholders perceived the current approaches of VET in Schools to be achieving and what in practice is seen in the patterns of participation and outcomes. The perceived strength of VET in Schools as a retention strategy is a key example of this. Data on the number of 15 to 19-year-old students in non-school vocational education and training show significant numbers of young people in many states continuing to leave school early and accessing vocational education without completing a senior secondary certificate. This indicates that, while VET in Schools may be working as a retention strategy for some, there is still a significant cohort of young people for whom it is not necessarily the effective retention strategy that it is perceived to be (NCVER 2011b).

In terms of a role for VET in Schools in preparing young people for direct access to employment, stakeholders from schools and system-level departments and authorities were particularly vocal in their assertion that this was a role that VET in Schools should be playing. There was a general awareness amongst participants that VET in Schools students were often in low-skilled and low-paid employment, but these initial post-school job experiences were described by many industry and employer participants as an important stepping stone for young people and an opportunity for them to demonstrate employability skills (for example, communication skills, presentation, punctuality). There was some scepticism from policy-makers and VET provider participants about the extent to which young people moved up and on from these low-level initial jobs. Tracking of VET in Schools graduates in Queensland (Department of Education and Training Queensland 2010) and Victoria (Rothman et al. 2011) indicates that these VET in Schools graduates are working more often than not in part-time, casualised, low-paid and low-skilled jobs, which is similar employment to their non-VET in Schools peers, who are working while studying at university. In relation to its being a pathway enhancing transition to higher-level VET post school, the available data also indicate that articulation from VET in Schools to these levels of study is limited.

For many of the other purposes of VET in Schools, as described above, there is little hard data (evidence) to measure the effectiveness of current models of provision. For example, there has been limited research that evaluates the contribution of VET in Schools to the effective career exploration of young people. This was a strong theme at the roundtables, with school and VET provider participants in particular emphasising the need for young people to experience, taste and explore their fields of interest in low-stakes environments. Anecdotal evidence from the first year of this study suggests that the opportunity to taste one or more kinds of occupational options through VET while still at school can play an important role in shaping the aspirations and pathways of VET in Schools students. There are several limitations in the current models of VET in Schools to effectively fulfilling a 'career exploration' role, as discussed below.

Architecture of VET in Schools

In all five roundtables there was critical discussion of the current structures of senior secondary certificates, particularly in relation to how VET in Schools was accommodated within those certificates. While the level of criticism of the senior secondary certificates differed across the various states, there were several points of consensus. The first point on which there was a general consensus was that vocational learning was needed earlier in secondary schooling, with many perceived benefits accruing from vocational learning earlier in secondary schooling. As a retention or

engagement strategy, stakeholders suggested that at age 16 or 17 years, young people at risk had often already disengaged from education, limiting the potential engagement impact of VET in Schools. By the senior secondary years, any changes or alterations to subject or program choice have implications for school completion and access to post-school training, thereby diluting the effectiveness of VET in Schools as a career exploration or taster program at that late stage in a young person's schooling.

While current models of VET in Schools are tied to school completion in the latter years of secondary schooling, students have limited opportunity to try and then change their mind, or try a range of options and then select one for their primary focus. Research on the effectiveness of careers advice programs in Victoria, including for 15 to 19-year-olds in vocational education and training, revealed a serious lack of knowledge and understanding amongst young people about what employment in their chosen occupations involved in practice and required as preparation (Sweet et al. 2010).

One of the great structural challenges in developing effective approaches to vocational learning earlier in secondary schooling is that current provision ties vocational learning to AQF qualifications and senior secondary units of study. This in turn ties participation in and completion of those qualifications and units of study to school completion. In contemplating the earlier commencement of vocational learning, school-based stakeholders understandably expressed concern about the possibility of Year 8 students commencing their senior secondary studies at such a young age. Evidently if serious consideration is to be given to more coherent and explicit models of vocational learning in the junior years of secondary school, an approach will be needed which does not rely on current VET in Schools models, where senior secondary units of study are used as the sole framework for vocational learning. In other words, a Year 8 student currently undertaking a VET in Schools unit will in effect be beginning their senior secondary learning phase early, since the VET in Schools subjects contribute to the senior secondary certificate. This has implications for their pathway choices and undermines the potential 'exploration' benefit of VET in Schools in the junior and middle years of secondary school.

In considering VET in Schools as a preparation for employment, there was overwhelming concern from stakeholders, particularly those from providers and industry bodies, that the limited access to integrated workplace learning in current models of VET in Schools provision significantly weakened the role that VET in Schools could play in supporting entry to occupations directly from school. These stakeholders highlighted that the predominantly entry-level training completed through VET in Schools provided limited exposure to real work situations, meaning that students were unlikely to be considered job-ready by potential employers.

The stakeholders reported that workplace learning, particularly where it is effectively integrated with the theoretical learning of vocational education and training, is crucial to students' understanding of the occupational requirements and pathway prerequisites in their chosen field. However, despite this consensus, there is no common approach to the integration of workplace learning in VET in Schools across Australia. The stakeholders described limited access to integrated workplace learning in many VET in Schools programs, which not only weakened direct entry to occupations but also constrained the career exploration role and pathways to further vocational study. The limited access to integrated workplace learning was described as not due to a lack of awareness of its importance but a result of logistical challenges, including relationships between schools and employers and school timetable constraints. Stakeholders from schools and VET providers described significant challenges in negotiating and arranging relevant and appropriate workplace learning opportunities for their students. A particular concern described by school stakeholders was the historically limited knowledge in schools of industry expectations and requirements.

Applied disciplinary knowledge

There has been general support for the increasing recognition of VET in Schools in senior school certificates. In many states, students now have the opportunity to complete their senior secondary education through predominantly vocational subjects. This increasing recognition was generally supported by stakeholders. However, several stakeholders described an ongoing tension between the opening-up of senior secondary certificates for maximising access and completion for a broader range of young people and simultaneously providing a core body of knowledge that all senior secondary students were expected to access and attain. Related to this was the concern that in the opening-up of senior secondary education to greater levels of vocational learning, there was a consequential decrease in the focus on the disciplinary learning needed to support post-school education and training. A common example used to illustrate this point was the VET in Schools used to support pathways to engineering and electrotechnology occupations. Stakeholders described a lack of awareness among students and occasionally among schools of the requisite disciplinary learning in mathematics to support access to both employment and post-school training in these fields. So the question remains: within a single senior secondary certificate how can sufficient disciplinary and vocational learning be integrated to enhance transition to occupations and further training?

Relationships and communication between stakeholders

VET in Schools as a component of senior secondary education involves and relies on many different stakeholders for its success. A key strength of the roundtable approach in this second year of research was the bringing together of an appropriately diverse range of stakeholders. Views across stakeholder types varied, although there were common levels of passion for and commitment to a role for vocational learning in schools. Despite the VET in Schools model's reliance on inherently cross-sectoral cooperation and collaboration, it became clear through the stakeholder discussions that there continues to be a lack of awareness of the role, contribution and needs of other stakeholders on all sides. Schools described a lack of awareness of industry and employer needs. Industry stakeholders described a lack of understanding of how schools operated and where VET in Schools sat in the secondary school context. In addition, there was evident confusion among some stakeholders, not only about the role played by different stakeholders, but also about the structural and logistic requirements of provision of VET in Schools. An example of the impact of this lack of understanding is the description provided by one industry representative of VET qualifications in their industry area being offered in senior secondary programs, despite the industry body highlighting the limited employment and further study opportunities for students post school. The response from school stakeholders in a scenario such as this is that schools are under pressure to provide programs that will engage and retain students, whether these effectively serve their long-term education and employment goals or not. This tension highlights the range of roles that VET in Schools is expected to perform.

There was strong consensus at all roundtables that better lines of communication and stronger relationships are needed to enhance the effectiveness of the inherently cross-sectoral models of VET in Schools. Trust and understanding between stakeholders was described as vital to strengthening the outcomes of students using VET in Schools as a pathway. VET in Schools provision must endeavour to achieve not only transparency for students and their families using and navigating the senior secondary landscape but also communities of trust and effective lines of communication for the stakeholders involved.

A 'programmatic' approach

A key focus of the stakeholder roundtables was to test the researchers' initial ideas on a 'programmatic' approach to VET in Schools. Feedback from stakeholders in all four jurisdictions examined during the first year of the research indicated that a *programmatic* approach is needed to bolster the capacity of vocational programs in schools to provide effective post-school transitions and outcomes for young people. This means emphasising the foundational nature of VET in Schools as a pathway to higher-level vocational studies to support participation in and completion of post-school vocational qualifications.

What do we mean by programmatic? This model or approach is centred on a conceptual shift away from a utilitarian or instrumentalist approach, which sees VET in Schools as providing a direct pathway to work, towards an approach that builds the skills *and* theoretical knowledge needed for entry to further higher-level VET and employment-based training. A programmatic approach to VET in Schools could be one in which the vocational learning was integrated with general and thematically relevant theoretical and academic study. For example, a student pursuing a pathway to an allied health occupation could embark on a senior secondary program of related academic and vocational subjects in health sciences. Similarly, a student aspiring to a post-school commercial cookery apprenticeship could undertake academic and vocational learning that builds the skills and theoretical knowledge needed for entry to and successful completion of the required employment-based training.

One of the criticisms levelled at VET in Schools is that, in seeking to create employment pathways for school completers, it forces students to choose narrow or specific occupational roles at a young age. A programmatic approach to VET in Schools could deal with this issue to some extent by focusing on how VET in Schools could support transition to a broad range of related occupations within an industry area. For example, instead of focusing on child care or aged care, VET in Schools could provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to undertake further study in a range of care occupations and provide more general access to streams of vocational knowledge and study at higher levels. In seeking to strengthen VET in Schools, consideration needs to be given to how the industry areas represented in VET in Schools programs link to post-school training options and labour market opportunities. The findings from year one of the research suggest that links between VET in Schools and the labour market need to be stronger and industry-specific rather than occupationally specific. In other words, a VET in Schools program could ideally provide students with foundational learning for entry to higher-level training towards a range of occupations in an industry area rather than deliver skills for a specific occupational role.

In year three of this research, a detailed model will be developed that draws on stakeholder feedback on several ideas. In seeking to gauge stakeholder responses to potential variations or structural changes to current models of VET in Schools, the researchers outlined these ideas during the roundtable discussion. They included:

- thematically linked subjects
- industry-broad rather than occupationally specific knowledge-based curriculum (for example, care occupations rather than child care, tourism and hospitality rather than commercial cookery)

- compulsory industry/workplace learning integrated with theoretical learning
- explicit links between VET in Schools curriculum and post-school VET.

The potentially most controversial idea was one exploring the feasibility of a model of VET in Schools that does not use parts of national training packages.³ The researchers sought to test the receptiveness of stakeholders to models of VET in Schools that may not include components of national training packages. The researchers were aware that this is a controversial idea, with stakeholders initially very sceptical of the feasibility of a model not inherently linked to the broader VET sector and its standards and qualifications. However, in Queensland and New South Wales, two states with some of the largest numbers of VET in Schools students, several stakeholders were open to considering models not built on existing VET qualifications as they were aware of the declining currency of the entry-level (foundational) AQF qualifications more broadly and for 15 to 19-year-olds in particular. While, this view was not the majority, the openness of these stakeholders from both school and system backgrounds is significant for the continuing discourse on strengthening, and finding new approaches to, vocational learning in schools.

Another element of the programmatic approach for which the researchers sought feedback was the movement from an occupationally specific VET in Schools curriculum to one which is industry-broad: in other words, a model not designed to train school students for a specific occupational role or job but rather to provide the foundational learning required to access and successfully transition to a broad range of occupational roles within an industry or related vocational stream and to its associated training. In support of such an approach, several stakeholders expressed concern that current models of VET in Schools placed a demand on young people to choose a specific job or occupation at an early age, often prior to sufficient career exploration. This demand was seen to be exacerbated for VET in Schools students compared with their non-VET in Schools peers. As several stakeholders described, students choosing academic subjects for their senior secondary program do so based on the experience of those subjects in the junior and middle years, while VET in Schools students with limited or no access to vocational learning in the junior and middle years are required to make their occupationally specific choices with limited information, knowledge or personal exposure.

The impact of limited career exploration and exposure to VET subjects prior to students choosing their senior secondary program was described by several stakeholders as being compounded by an apparent lack of transparency on the links between VET in Schools and post-school VET. While there is abundant documentation informing young people about the prerequisites and entry requirements for higher education programs contained in school career programs, stakeholders described the ongoing weaknesses and confusion in relation to the links needed to support pathways from school to study at TAFE (technical and further education) and other VET providers. From the perspective of a student this might mean having limited awareness of what their certificate II can lead to, in terms of higher-level study post school. In addition, a particular area of concern highlighted by stakeholders was the lack of awareness of the complementary disciplinary knowledge needed to support and enhance transitions to post-school VET. For example, a young person aspiring to enter a university course may

³ This approach differs from previous models of 'embedded' VET used in some jurisdictions. Embedded models of VET used in the past have largely been replaced due to a lack of utility either in providing access to occupations or further and higher education. The approach proposed by the researchers here provides an alternative to the current model, which has been criticised by participants throughout the two years of this research as being restricted to a focus on skills preparation for a narrow occupational outcome. The approach proposed here is built around subjects that have status within the senior secondary certificates of education and form part of a broader package of themed or programmatic studies, but may use different or additional pedagogical approaches to the disciplinary curriculum.

be informed of this option through university open days, school-based guest speakers and information nights and a school-based career education program integrated with the traditionally academic senior secondary certificate, as well as a plethora of publicly available documentation. Conversely, secondary school students, VET in Schools students or not, were described by stakeholders as often having limited exposure in the school environment to any material designed to support their navigation to post-school VET study. School stakeholders at the roundtables expressed frustration that publicly available documentation (for example, newspaper lift-outs and information guides) continued to favour university-based pathways. They also described the difficulties facing schools in articulating the links between vocational learning at school and post-school VET, particularly for a cohort seen as aspiring to a job straight out of school.

Senior secondary education contexts based on a traditional model of university entry preparation, as they are in most Australian states and territories, are required to support a growing number of young people pursuing and aspiring to vocational occupations and pathways post school. Stakeholders highlighted not only the absence of publicly available materials but also a lack of the appropriate teacher knowledge and experience in vocational fields as hindering school capacity to effectively support vocationally aspiring students. An effective model of VET in Schools needs to provide *real* chances for progress (that is, higher learning post school *and* occupational progression) and also enable young people to access the mid-level and higher-level skills to gain and maintain sustainable employment.

Looking forward

The feedback from stakeholders during the roundtables provided a detailed illustration of the conceptual, structural and cross-sectoral challenges of effective VET in Schools provision and also provided an insight into what might be needed to achieve a strengthened model of VET in Schools. In this section of the report the potential elements of a strengthened VET in Schools approach are drawn together.

How could VET in Schools be strengthened?

Foundational pathway to further training

The weak relationship between education and work and the declining currency of entry-level AQF qualifications contribute to the poor occupational outcomes for VET in Schools students. While described as currently still weak, the potential exists for strong and coherent links between school-level vocational learning and post-school VET. In light of the data on poor employment outcomes for VET in Schools students, VET in Schools could be strengthened through a stronger focus (at a policy and practice level) on its role as a foundational pathway to further training.

Integration of vocational and career learning within school curriculum

While vocational subjects have rapidly become more prevalent in senior secondary certificates, their integration and relationships with disciplinary learning have been described by stakeholders as still weak. Providers and employers were vocal in their concern that VET in Schools students were leaving secondary school lacking the requisite disciplinary knowledge to support their vocational skills and/or vocational learning at a higher level and without sufficient exposure to industry learning. There are two potential ways of addressing this. Firstly, vocational learning could be more systemically introduced in the junior and middle years of secondary school. Secondly, changes could be made to the way in which senior secondary vocational subjects are undertaken alongside academic programs, with the aim of encouraging complementary program selection.

Purpose built school-based vocational curriculum

Inherently linked to the expectation held by many students and their families that VET in Schools is the ticket to a job (see Clarke & Polesel 2013) is the fact that VET in Schools programs use AQF qualifications as the structural basis of vocational learning. With a possible shift to a focus on vocational education and training in the senior secondary years as a foundational pathway to further training (as described above), there is scope for discussion of a school-based VET curriculum not based on national training packages. A purpose-built school-based vocational curriculum could strengthen VET in Schools by being more closely aligned to the broader preparatory role of the senior secondary certificates.

A clearer role for employers

A constant theme during the roundtables was the concern that VET in Schools students were not 'job ready', due both to a lack of exposure to workplaces and industry and to the level of qualifications they had undertaken. Expanding the workplace learning opportunities for senior secondary students will not be a quick fix. As the number of VET in Schools students increases, so does the demand for placements in workplaces. Some roundtable participants suggested there was a need for financial

incentives for employers. A strategy with the potential to address some of the concerns may be the articulation of a clearer role for employers, and industry more broadly, in the development of vocational programs in schools.

A clearer role for VET providers

If a strengthened approach to VET in Schools is one in which there is a stronger focus on pathways to post-school training, there is a need for those pathways to be made more explicit. The question for the VET in Schools student is how is vocational learning at school leading to vocational learning and occupations post school? The roundtable consultations highlighted the current gap in understanding, communication and synergy between the vocational learning in schools and the vocational options available to students post school.

Heading into the third and final year of the 'Entry to vocations' study, the researchers will develop a model of VET in Schools based on the elements raised here and test it with stakeholders.

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Appendix A – Roundtable participants

Victorian Roundtable – 7 August 2012

Name	Organisation
Daryl Sutton	Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority (VECCI)
David Baber	Director Pathways Branch, Pathways, Participation and Youth Division, Higher Education and Skills Group, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Annette Lancy	Acting Director, Strategic Projects, Tertiary Education Policy and Strategic Projects Division, Higher Education and Skills Group, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Brendan Watson	Principal, Catholic Regional College, Sydenham
Peter Devery	Catholic Education Commission of Victoria
Trudy McNally	Holmesglen Vocational College
Rose Lewanski	VET in Schools Manager, Victoria University
Elise Toomey	VET in Schools Manager, RMIT
Vicki Bawden	Northern Metropolitan VET Cluster
Marg O'Shea	VETiS Coordinator, Copperfield College
Raffaella Galati-Brown	Principal, Northland College of Arts and Technology
Linda Barron	Executive Officer Victorian Food Industry Training Board
Joan Whelan	Project Manager, Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council
Andrew Rimmington	Senior Manager, Employment, Education and Training, VECCI
Raewynn Black	Project Coordinator, VECCI
Pam Hargreaves	Education Consultant, Pathways, Independent Schools Victoria
Ben Vivekanandan	Policy and Research Manager, ACPET
Vanessa Hoppe	Victorian Training Manager, MEGT
Brad Green	Project Manager, Sports Education Development Australia (SEDA)

New South Wales Roundtable – 8 August 2012

Name	Organisation
Kathy Esson	R/Senior Manager, Skills Strategy, Department of Education and Communities (DEC)
Jeanette Allen	Service Skills Australia
Gail Silman	NSW Education and Training Adviser at Australian Industry Group
Susan Scowcroft	Community Services and Health ITAB
Dianne Dayhew	NSW Construction and Select Property Services ITAB
Nick Proud	Director Policy & Research, NSW Construction and Select Property Services ITAB
Melissa Wortman	Executive Officer, AgriFood NSW
Norm Cahill	NSW Utilities & Eletechnology ITAB
Leon Drury	Manufacturing Skills ITAB
Gerard Delaney	State Coordinator VET, NSW Catholic Education Commission
Stephen Mitchell	VET Advisor, Catholic Education Office Bathurst
Pat O'Reilly	Principal, Southern Cross Catholic Vocational College, Burwood
Paul Rodney	Catholic Education Office, NSW
Philippa Esdaile	TAFE NSW
Jennifer Raines	TAFE NSW
Robert Mulas	Principal, Fairfield High Schools
Glen Bennett	Principal Officer, VET in Schools in Schools Directorate, DEC NSW
Patricia Strauss	Senior Policy Officer, NSW Catholic Education Commission
Glenda O'Brien	Principal Education Officer, VET Hunter/Central Coast region
Lynne Mabb	Vocational Education Consultant, DEC Northern Sydney Region
Bianca Marlin	Vocational Education Consultant, DEC Western Sydney Region
Graham Hodgkins	Principal, Jamison High School, Penrith Valley
Ian Balcomb	NSW Board of Studies
Jill Heinrich	NSW Board of Studies
Ka Chan	Job Quest (private registered training organisation)
Margaret Vickers	University of Western Sydney
Jeff Priday	Group Training Australia
Heather Chand	VET in Schools Consultant, Independent Schools Association of NSW

South Australian Roundtable – 14 August 2012

Name	Organisation
Bridget Wibrow	NCVER
Maria Urbano	Catholic Education South Australia
David Hurley	St Patrick's Technical College
Wendy Ettridge	Group Training Australia South Australia
Rene Nikolic	Training Manager Adelaide Training and Employment Centre
Dannii Armfield	Partnership Broker, Inner South of Adelaide
Steve Birnie	Program Manager Construction Industry Training Board South Australia
Michael White	Vocational Education Consultant Catholic Education South Australia
Elizabeth Owens	Health and Community Services Skills Board
Margaret Lambert	Teaching & Learning Services – Industry Skills Program, Department of Education and Children's Services
Elizabeth Lendrum	Business Services Industry Skills Board SA Inc (BSISB)
Marilyn Wall	Independent Schools South Australia
John Cassebohm	Food, Tourism and Hospitality Industry Skills Advisory Council SA Inc
Barb Cowey	Business South Australia
Kym Clayton	Principal Policy Officer, Quality, Tertiary Education, Science & Research Directorate (QTESR)
Rob Portsch	Underdale High School
Laura Luongo	VETiS Coordinator, Windsor Gardens Vocational College
Paulette Sargent	Principal, Windsor Gardens Vocational College
Malcolm Hughes	Industry Skills Program, Department Education and Children's Services
Jillian Blight	Industry Skills Program, Department Education and Children's Services
Kym Williams	Business Development Manager, TAFE SA
Jenice Wheeler	Educational Manager, TAFE SA
Robyn Barker	Clipjoint (Hairdressing Training College) and Australian Council for Private Education and Training, SA
Shamus Shutt	South Australia Certificate of Education (SACE) Board, VET Unit
Tony Mercurio	Executive Manager of Curriculum Services SACE Board, VET Unit
Richard Megaw	Salisbury High School

Queensland Roundtable – 16 August 2012

Name	Organisation
Robyn Ward	SkillsTech Australia
Di Lewis	SkillsTech Australia
Stephen Dunn	Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE
Alicia Bettles	Southbank Institute
Jenny Field	Academic Manager, Prime Learning
Anne Schafer	Principal Advisor Education Queensland
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Anita Dwyer	Apprenticeships Qld
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Robyn Pedler	Sunnybank State High School
Stewart Cooke	Skills Alliance
Dave Mitchell	Group Training Queensland and Northern Territory
Jennifer Towler	Brisbane Catholic Education
Bob Knight	Queensland Catholic Education Commission
Robyn Laurens	Independent Schools Queensland
Lisa Tran	St Peter Claver College, Riverview
Leisa Jones	Grace Lutheran College
Kathryn Moody	Queensland Tourism Industry Council
Rod Eske	Construction Skills Queensland
Lisa Kennedy	Training Policy & Workforce Development, Construction Skills Qld
Danielle Calcutt	Construction and Property Services ITAB
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Western Australian Roundtable – 23 August 2012

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Gary Hicklin	Seven Oaks Senior College
Paola Pasterelli	VET in Schools Coordinator, Mirrabooka Senior High School
Alan Feahy	Australian Trades College Western Australia
Iain McDougall	General Manager, Hospitality Group Training
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Nicole Gazey	Curriculum and Assessment Officer – VET, Curriculum Council
Glenda Voros	Manager Intergovernmental Relations & Research Policy Planning and Research Branch, Department of Training and Workforce Development
Rachael Davidson	Creative and Leisure Industries Training Council
Deb Kerrison	College of Retail Training
Jessica Hardy-Oborne	College of Retail Training
Lisa Pitters	Manager VET for Schools Programs, Challenger TAFE
Nhi Do	Challenger TAFE
Sharon Gough	Midland Job Link Inc
Jenny Branigan	VET in Schools Team, Polytechnic West
Bronwyn Blencowe	Managing Director, VETiS Consulting Services Pty Ltd Chairperson ,National Corporate Training Pty Ltd
Alan Blencowe	Managing Director ,VETiS Consulting Services Pty Ltd Chairperson, National Corporate Training Pty Ltd
Katie Bray	Principal Policy Consultant, Intergovernmental Relations & Research Department of Training and Workforce Development
Helen McNeill	Financial, Administration and Professional Services Training Council
Brad Armstrong	Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council Western Australia
Jillian Dielesen	Logistics Training Council
Maryanne Huges	Catholic Education Office Western Australia
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Linda Winter	Education Training Adviser, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of WA (CCIWA)
Fran van Riessen	Education Consultant, Vocational Education & Training, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
Phillip Jackson	West Coast Institute
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Appendix B – Entry to vocations: year 2 discussion paper

Entry to the vocations: a discussion paper on strengthening VET in Schools⁴

Introduction

In 2010 more than 230 000 Australian senior secondary students participated in VET in Schools (NCVER 2011a). Recent policy changes have facilitated an expanded role for VET in Schools in supporting school completion, while VET in Schools is also receiving increasing recognition within senior secondary certificates. Despite increased attainment of VET qualifications amongst 15 to 19-year-olds (Australian Curriculum, Reporting and Assessment Authority 2011), the outcomes of vocational learning within Australian senior secondary certificates are still problematic (Rothman et al. 2011; Department of Education and Training Queensland 2011), with the vast majority (around 80%) of VET qualifications completed through VET in Schools being at certificates I and II level (NCVER 2011a). These predominantly low-level qualifications do not provide strong pathways to work and occupations. There is also evidence that VET in Schools students are not experiencing strong transitions to higher-level post-school VET. Post-school tracking surveys conducted in Queensland and Victoria indicate that many more VET in Schools students enter the labour market without further education or training than enter higher-level VET (Rothman et al. 2011; Department of Education and Training Queensland 2011).

As part of the NCVER consortium research program, ‘Vocations: the link between post-compulsory education and the labour market’, the Education Policy and Leadership unit at the University of Melbourne is conducting research focused on entry to vocations and how to improve occupational and further study outcomes from entry-level vocational education and training. The key research question being addressed is: What are the main variables shaping the relationship between VET, employment and occupations at the entry-level? Entry-level VET is taken here to encompass VET at certificate levels I and II and all VET completed through VET in Schools as part of a senior secondary certificate, which in limited instances includes certificate III and above. Nationally, students studying entry-level qualifications make up more than one in five of all VET students (NCVER 2011b).

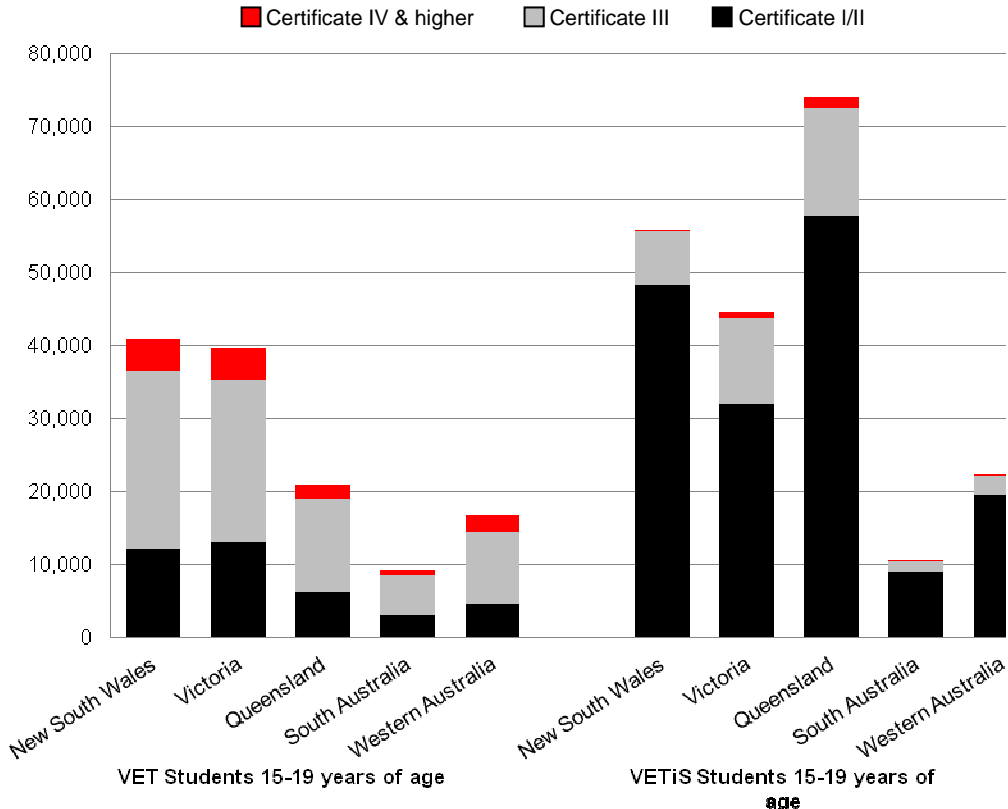
While the focus here is on the role of VET in Schools as a curriculum option strengthening outcomes for all young people, it is important to note the limited role that VET in Schools is playing for the 15 to 19-year-old cohort overall. VET in Schools students and school-based apprentices and trainees account for only 14% of the total Australian 15 to 19-year-old cohort (Australian Curriculum, Reporting and Assessment Authority 2011). If we look at 16-year-olds, the last year of compulsory schooling in most Australian states and territories, VET in Schools students and school-based apprentices and trainees make up only 27% of the age cohort. Moreover, there are more than 161 000 young people aged between 15 and 19 years who have not completed a senior school certificate studying VET outside schools (NCVER, VOCSTATS, extracted 1/8/12).

If we focus solely on the VET activity of 15 to 19-year-olds, for the five jurisdictions being consulted in year two of the research (Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Western

⁴ This discussion paper was circulated to all stakeholders before the roundtable discussions.

Australia), VET in Schools students make up almost two-thirds (62.0%) of all 15 to 19-year-olds studying vocational subjects, excluding school completers (see figure 1). Queensland stands out in this context, with more than half (78.0%) of all 15 to 19-year-old VET students participating in VET in Schools. The representation of VET in Schools students in the broader 15 to 19-year-old VET cohort varies greatly by certificate level. VET in Schools students make up more than three-quarters of students at certificate I and II levels (81.0%) and approximately a third (33.4%) of students studying at certificate III level, before dropping off dramatically to constitute less than one in five of 15 to 19-year-olds studying at certificate IV level and above (19.7%). In seeking to enhance and strengthen the role of VET in Schools in securing ‘transition to a broad range of post-school options and pathways’ (Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2000), consideration should also be given to the capacity of VET in Schools programs to cater to the needs of the around 161 000 15 to 19-year-olds opting to forego school completion in pursuit of vocational study outside the senior secondary certificates. Operating on the premise that young people should be completing school before embarking on further tertiary or vocational study, the large numbers of 15 to 19-year-olds in non-school VET who have not completed a senior secondary certificate, as highlighted in figure A1, suggests that current arrangements for VET in Schools are not meeting their needs.

Figure A1 VET in Schools and VET participation of 15 to 19-year-olds (excluding school completers), by state and AQF level, 2010



Note: Graph uses both Student and Courses and VET in Schools datasets. VET Students 15–19 years of age without Year 12 excludes those students still at school.

Source: NCVET, VOCSTATS (extracted 1/8/12).

Year one of the ‘Entry to vocations’ research, conducted in 2011, involved qualitative interviews with and surveys of a broad range of stakeholders as part of four detailed case studies of VET in Schools provision in four jurisdictions (Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales). Drawing on the findings of those case studies, year two of the research aims to gather feedback from VET in

Schools stakeholders on the purposes of and outcomes of VET that we should be seeking and how VET in Schools can be strengthened to better support pathways to post-school education and training.

This discussion paper, drawing on the themes and issues that have emerged from the research so far, seeks to establish a context for the discussion of how to strengthen current approaches to VET in Schools. It does this through the lens of two key themes: the purpose of VET in Schools; and the senior secondary landscape in which VET in Schools exists. This discussion paper concludes by posing seven key questions to VET in Schools stakeholders.

The purpose of VET in Schools

Within today's labour market, a Year 12 or senior secondary certificate is no longer enough to provide access for school completers to employment other than to low-skilled and increasingly casualised jobs. While much has been said and written about the positive impact of VET in Schools on school retention (Nguyen 2010; Anlezark, Karmel & Ong 2006), if the retention is simply delaying direct entry to the labour market, the question must be asked: to what extent is staying on to complete school strengthening the opportunities and outcomes for VET in School students? What has been observed during year one of the research is that the foundational nature of VET in Schools does not effectively support student transition directly into entry-level occupations. A key reason for this is the weak currency of entry-level certificates (for example, certificates I and II) in the Australian labour market.

Within this context of the declining currency of both Year 12 and entry-level VET certificates, school completers need access to post-school training in order to support their effective labour market entry. Current mainstream models of VET in Schools provision examined during year one of the research appear to lack strong pathways to higher-level vocational education that supports occupations requiring mid-level skills. There is a need to enhance and strengthen the role for VET in Schools as a pathway to post-school vocational education, including to both campus-based and employment-based training opportunities.

Feedback from stakeholders in all four jurisdictions examined in year one of the research indicated that a pathways or programmatic approach is needed to bolster the capacity of vocational programs within schools to provide effective post-school transitions and outcomes for young people. This means emphasising the foundational nature of VET in Schools as a pathway to higher-level vocational studies that will support participation in and completion of post-school vocational qualifications.

What do we mean by programmatic? A programmatic approach to VET in Schools signifies a movement away from a utilitarian approach to VET in Schools (for example, retention and job preparation) towards an approach that embraces the educational and knowledge-building purposes of VET in Schools (for example, a pathway to further study/training). A programmatic approach to VET in Schools could be one in which the vocational learning was integrated with general and thematically relevant theoretical and academic study. For example, a student pursuing a pathway to an allied health occupation could embark on a senior secondary program of related academic and vocational subjects in health sciences. Similarly, a student aspiring to a post-school commercial cookery apprenticeship could undertake academic and vocational learning that builds the skills and theoretical knowledge needed for entry to and successful completion of the required employment-based training.

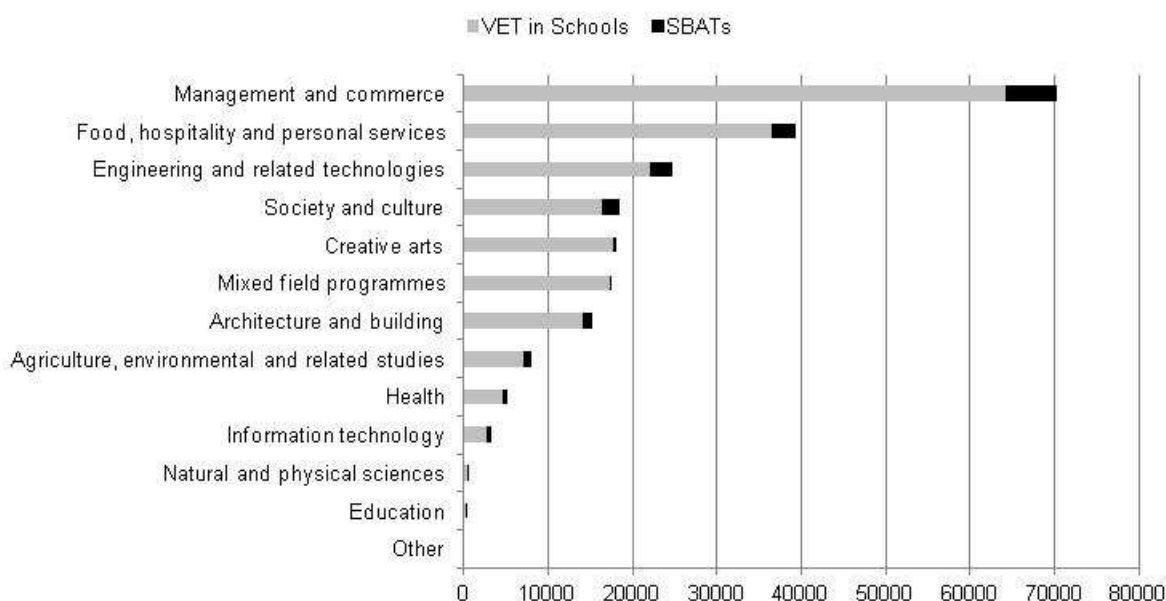
One of the criticisms levelled at VET in Schools is that in seeking to create employment pathways for school completers it forces students to choose narrow or specific occupational roles at a young age. A programmatic approach to VET in Schools could deal with this issue to some extent by focusing on how VET in Schools can support transition to a broad range of related occupations within an industry area.

For example, instead of focusing on child care or aged care, VET in Schools could provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to undertake further study in a range of care occupations. In seeking to strengthen VET in Schools, consideration needs to be given to how the industry areas represented in VET in Schools programs link with post-school training and labour market options. The findings from year one of the research suggest that stronger links between VET in Schools and the labour market need to be industry-specific rather than occupationally specific. In other words, a VET in Schools program should provide students with foundational learning for entry to higher-level training towards a range of occupations within an industry area rather than deliver skills for a specific occupational role.

Currently, the industry areas attracting students to participate in VET in Schools are not always the industry areas where skill shortages and labour demands mean strong opportunities for post-school training and employment. This was a key policy and practice tension identified by stakeholders in year one of the research. On one hand, for VET in Schools to be an effective retention tool, the qualifications offered need to be attractive and interesting to students. Conversely, facilitating participation in vocational qualifications that are observed as having limited post-school learning or employment potential undermines the purpose and benefits of school completion. As shown in figure A2 VET in Schools participation is dominated by management and commerce, of which three-quarters (75.7%) is participation at certificate I and II level in office studies (NCVER, VOCSTATS, extracted 1/8/12). Participation in food, hospitality and personal services is similarly dominated by certificates I and II level study. In seeking to strengthen VET in Schools through a possible programmatic approach, a question arises regarding how to strike the all-important balance between what students want to study and what provides the strongest outcomes. This further supports the notion inherent in a programmatic approach to VET in Schools: that vocational learning within senior secondary schooling need not be job-specific, and in contrast, could prepare students for a broadly defined occupation such as care work.

Along with strengthening pathways to post-school institutional or campus-based VET, a successful programmatic approach to VET in Schools also needs to strengthen entry to employment-based training. Evidence suggests that apprenticeship pathways are an effective option for VET in Schools students, particularly for young men (Karmel & Liu 2011). Figure A2 highlights the still limited role being played by school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. Feedback from stakeholders in year one of the research indicates that some school-based apprentices are being precluded from entry to full-time post-school apprenticeships by employers because they have reached stage two of their theoretical learning but have minimal industry experience. It was also suggested by some stakeholders that even where substantial workplace learning had been included within VET in Schools programs, a perception still existed amongst employers that VET in Schools is 'not real VET'.

Figure A2 VET in Schools fields of education, 15 to 19-year-olds in VET in Schools, 2010



Source: NCVET, VOCSTATS (extracted 1/8/12).

This type of scepticism of VET in Schools amongst industry and some registered training organisations has been well documented (Polesel et al. 2004; Service Skills Australia 2010). In our consultations in year one of this research, interviewees identified a lack of understanding of VET in Schools as limiting its effectiveness. Interviewees commonly identified a ‘lack of understanding and confidence in VET in Schools’, ‘training credentials not viewed positively’, ‘a perception from industry and some VET training institutions that VET in schools is not real VET’ as factors limiting the efficacy of VET in Schools as an employment pathway.

While there appeared to be consensus on the need to provide access to structured workplace learning for all VET in Schools students, the challenge remains as to how to effectively integrate the experiential learning undertaken in a workplace setting with the learning undertaken within a school or institutional setting. This integration is even more important within a programmatic approach to VET in Schools, where students are not being prepared for a single occupational role but require access to workplace learning that enhances skills and the theoretical preparation for access to a broad range of industry-related occupations.

The senior secondary landscape

Discussion of a possible programmatic approach to VET in Schools takes place within the structure of VET in Schools in senior secondary certificates. VET in Schools has undergone a rapid process of formal recognition and inclusion within the various senior secondary certificates across Australian states and territories. While some common themes have emerged from this growing formalisation of vocational learning in upper secondary schooling, each jurisdiction has approached the inclusion of VET in Schools in different ways. Stakeholders consulted during year one of the research identified several points of contention about the ways in which VET in Schools is accommodated in the senior secondary certificate architectures.

The complex relationship between VET in Schools and the state-based systems for calculating university entrance ranks continues to be a source of concern. The capacity of schools to provide a programmatic approach to VET in Schools, one in which students can engage in both a breadth and depth of learning to support their vocational pathways, has also been called into question by the breadth of study requirements and limitations placed on VET in Schools subjects within some jurisdictions. An important question to raise here is the availability in the current models of VET in Schools provision for all students to access the disciplinary or applied disciplinary knowledge needed for higher-level study (Young 2007). Do students aspiring to post-school VET have access to the vocationally relevant theoretical knowledge needed to support their learning at higher qualification levels? Several stakeholders consulted in year one of this research suggested that the focus on VET in Schools as a retention instrument and employment pathway restricted the access of VET in Schools students to the theoretical knowledge and learning skills needed to successfully participate in higher-level study.

Respondents across the four case study jurisdictions examined in year one also called for more to be done to clarify the pathway outcomes of specific VET in Schools qualifications and programs. This was seen as particularly important in areas where higher-level qualifications were being offered (for example, certificate III and above). Given the diversity of industry areas now encompassed by VET in Schools, it is impossible to apply blanket rulings on which level of VET qualifications should be promoted or limited within senior secondary education. However, more clarity is required to make explicit the value or currency of different levels of VET in Schools qualifications for students pursuing post-school training options.

All VET in Schools stakeholders have a role to play in making the value of VET in Schools qualifications more explicit, no more so than those working in secondary schools. Secondary schools play a crucial role in supporting young people to construct the meaningful pathways that achieve both the breadth and depth of learning needed to pursue their post-school aspirations. Porter (2006) found that ‘the adequacy of career guidance and dissemination’ influenced young people’s decisions about their post-school destinations. Unfortunately, not all careers advice about subject choice or post-school course entry requirements is accurate or sufficient. Smith and Green (2005) have identified a perceived lack of effective career advice for young people related to both occupations and post-school training pathways. Anlezark, Karmel and Ong (2006) suggest that ‘students self-select into school VET programs because they see these programs as providing a better match with their (self) perceived academic ability’ (p.7).

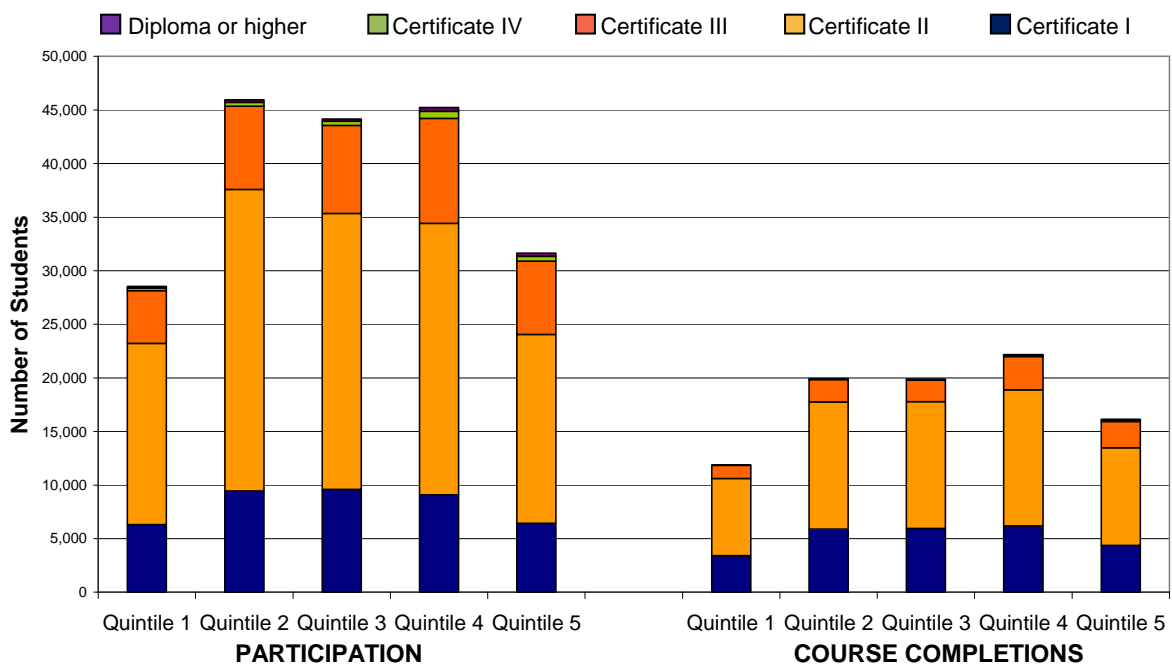
What emerged from interviews with stakeholders in year one of the research was the frequent positioning of VET in Schools in careers advice structures as an ‘employment preparation pathway’. Common descriptions of the purpose or role of VET in Schools included: ‘work ready skills and knowledge that underpins industry workplace requirements’, ‘facilitat[ing] a smoother transition for all young people into employment’ and ‘provid[ing] [non-university entrance] eligible students with a viable interacting transition to work’. There was also a concern among several VET in Schools stakeholders outside schools that ‘a lack of career development support due to an over-emphasis by career practitioners on higher education pathways’ may be hindering the effectiveness of VET in Schools as a pathway to post-school VET.

A successful programmatic approach to VET in Schools relies on an appropriately holistic and effective approach to vocationally specific career guidance. Like their higher education aspiring peers, senior secondary students aspiring to technical and trades-based occupations need access to careers guidance that builds clear links between their school-based education and post-school education and

training options. Elements identified by stakeholders for strengthening career guidance for VET in Schools students included providing opportunities for vocational learning and industry exposure in the junior and middle years of secondary schooling, establishing stronger links with registered training organisations to support articulation to higher-level VET and drawing more explicit links between vocational learning and the academic or theoretical curriculum.

VET in Schools is perceived by many to be the ‘working-class pathway’ to school completion. While low socioeconomic status students make up the vast majority of VET in Schools participation, there is evidence to suggest that social stratification within VET in Schools participation further marginalises those lowest SES students, who have few viable alternatives. As shown in figure A3, the two highest SES quintiles account for more than 50% of the participation and around two-thirds of course completion at certificate IV and above. By comparison, the lowest SES quintile makes up only slightly more than one in ten of the enrolments and less than one in ten of the course completions at certificate IV and above. What this shows is that not only are our poorest senior secondary students outnumbered in the VET in Schools classroom by their more affluent peers; these lowest SES students are also under-represented in higher-level certificate participation. These VET in Schools participation patterns, combined with our knowledge that low-SES students are the most likely to go directly into the labour market post school, further support the need for a strengthened and more programmatic approach to VET in Schools, one that paves clear and coherent pathways to higher-level training. In addition, with a programmatic approach to VET in Schools which integrates discipline based curriculum, students would receive the generic literacy and numeracy skills needed to participate in society as informed and confident citizens.

Figure A3 AQF level participation and course completions by SES quintiles, 15 to 19-year-olds in VET in Schools, 2009



Source: NCVET, VOCSTATS (extracted 9/4/12).

Discussion points

In year two of the ‘Entry to vocations’ research, the research team is conducting a series of roundtables with VET in Schools stakeholders in Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia. These roundtables will bring together stakeholders from education

and training authorities, boards of study, public and private registered training organisations, group training organisations, schools from all three sectors and representatives of peak industry and skills advisory bodies.

Through these roundtables, the researchers are seeking feedback from stakeholders in response to the following key questions:

- 1 Should the purpose of VET in Schools be to prepare students for direct entry to work, or should it be primarily to prepare students for post-school VET in either apprenticeships or institutionally based VET?
- 2 How can VET in Schools more effectively facilitate pathways to post-school VET?
- 3 Is the current architecture of VET in Schools, with its focus on job specific learning, the most appropriate approach to vocational learning in the senior secondary years?
- 4 In seeking to ensure that all students have access to the disciplinary or applied disciplinary knowledge needed to support post-school education and training, is there a need to differentiate the provision of senior secondary discipline-based subjects? For example, the provision of streams within discipline-based subjects that are more explicitly related to technical and trade pathways.
- 5 In what ways can career guidance, at a system and school level, play a role in supporting transition to post-school VET?
- 6 Should formalised vocational learning be limited to the senior secondary years? Is there a need for increased vocational learning in the junior and middle years to inform and strengthen vocational pathways and VET in Schools choices?
- 7 How useful is the term 'VET in Schools' in encapsulating the vocational learning taking place within senior secondary schooling?

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