

At a glance



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Vocational education and training (VET) programs for young people have significantly expanded over the past decade. This publication provides an overview of all the different VET options and details the emerging benefits and outcomes of the options that fall within the recognised VET framework. Current implementation issues are also summarised.

Key messages

- Students, while still at school, can now undertake VET subjects, full course programs or a school-based New Apprenticeship as part of their senior secondary certificate, which also contribute towards a recognised VET qualification. Previously, students could only undertake school curriculum, which focused on preparing them for higher education.
- The social benefits of recognised VET qualifications in schools are starting to be realised, and include improved student maturity, independence and motivation for learning, reduced absenteeism and greater understanding of career options.
- Stakeholder groups overwhelmingly acknowledge that structured workplace learning, where students gain industry-specific skills from real work, is central to achieving the above-mentioned social benefits and to raising the profile of VET as a worthwhile education option. However, only school-based New Apprenticeships always include structured workplace learning. To meet the demand, new models of quality structured workplace learning may be needed.
- Preliminary data are available on the destinations of students who undertook recognised VET as part of the senior secondary certificate. One year after doing so, they tend to be in VET and at higher levels than they were in at school. By contrast, those not undertaking VET at school were much more likely to proceed to university.
- There are three main challenges to implementing recognised VET options in schools. These are: different perceptions of the value and quality of the vocational education and training being delivered; delivery issues associated with meeting the requirements of both schools and VET; and resourcing challenges.
- There are also challenges for the VET sector in relation to school students who leave early—before completing Year 12. Within two to three years after leaving school early, between two-thirds and three-quarters of young people reconnect with education through VET or adult community education providers. They can also undertake pre-apprenticeships, but the availability of this option has reduced since the introduction of VET in Schools.
- To get a true and full picture of the educational foundation of young people, the research suggests we need to track them to the age of 25 years, rather than the current age of 19 years, in order to take account of gap years, and the fact that many undertake a mix of education and work for several years.

The VET options explained

In the 1980s high levels of youth unemployment resulted in increased school retention rates. Consequently, there was a more diverse range of students at school, not all of whom would or wanted to go on to higher education on which the school curriculum was focused. It became clear to policy-makers that the requirements of senior secondary students had changed and there was a need to provide more diverse educational opportunities and pathways to work or further study. They perceived that increasing the vocational component of schooling would help to achieve this.

In 1996 Commonwealth funding was approved to enable VET programs to be introduced into schools. This resulted in VET becoming available to school students within senior secondary schooling as well as still being available to people of all ages outside the school system, including those who leave school early.

A recent review of VET in Schools literature by Barnett and Ryan (forthcoming) noted that this increase in VET options for young people made defining the options confusing and difficult. Furthermore, this same review indicated that it is only now that research is becoming available which reports on the actual outcomes and benefits of these relatively new programs.

Figure 1 shows the full range of VET options for young people.

Figure 1: VET options for school-aged people*

1. Recognised VET undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate**	a. VET subjects/courses with structured workplace learning b. VET subjects/courses without structured workplace learning c. School-based New Apprenticeships
2. Recognised VET outside schools – New Apprenticeships ■ General VET subjects/courses ■ Pre-apprenticeships ■ Vocational preparation/foundation courses	a. School students enrolling part-time and independently from school b. School leavers enrolling part-time or full-time
3a. Other vocational learning inside schools ■ Other vocational subjects (e.g. bookkeeping) ■ Work experience and work readiness ■ Career education ■ Enterprise education ■ Community based/service learning ■ Youth development programs	3b. Other vocational learning outside schools ■ Work experience and work readiness ■ Career education ■ Community based/service learning ■ Youth development programs ■ Employment

Note: *Variations between state/territory ** Otherwise known as VET in Schools

Figure 1 indicates that, while at school, students can undertake recognised VET as part of the senior secondary certificate. These students attain a VET qualification, or part thereof, and the senior secondary certificate. This option is commonly known as VET in Schools. It is not a single option because under the VET in Schools arrangements, students can undertake VET subjects or VET courses or school-based New Apprenticeships. When undertaking VET subjects or courses as part of the senior secondary certificate, the program may or may not include structured workplace learning. The exceptions to this are New South Wales and Tasmania, where structured workplace learning is mandatory. School-based New Apprenticeships on the other hand, always require formal engagement with the workplace and structured learning, since they involve paid employment and a training contract.

School-aged students and early school leavers in particular, can also undertake VET subjects or courses, New Apprenticeships or pre-apprenticeships within the VET system and external to the school system. Obviously, these options do not contribute to the senior secondary certificate.

Both within and outside schools, there are also vocational learning options that fall outside the nationally recognised VET framework. These options include work preparation, work experience, career education, enterprise education and community projects. Although these options are beyond the scope of this publication, a distinction needs to be made between work experience, work preparation and structured workplace learning, activities which are often confused. Structured workplace learning is situated within a real or simulated workplace, providing supervised learning activities that contribute to an assessment of competency and achievement of outcomes relevant to the requirements of a training package¹ or accredited national courses that lead to Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualifications. Work experience is unpaid work and/or observation in the workplace, and work readiness is a short orientation program. These latter options do not address or result in the acquisition of any of the competencies specified within a training package or national accredited course.

This publication provides information on:

- recognised VET subjects and courses undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate
- school-based New Apprenticeships
- recognised VET options undertaken by early school leavers.

The focus is on 2003 participation levels, emerging benefits and preliminary outcomes data and implementation challenges. We do not attempt here to offer any conclusions on whether the VET options have made a real difference for young people in terms of their education and career progression—this will be the subject of further research.

Recognised VET subjects or courses undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate

Recognised VET subjects or courses undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate are typically available in Years 11 and 12. However, in Victoria and remote areas of the Northern Territory, students can enrol in subjects that contribute to the senior secondary certificate and a VET qualification prior to Years 11 and 12.

Participation and training activity

A companion to this publication called *Australian vocational education and training statistics: VET in Schools 2003* (Nguyen 2004) focuses on school students undertaking recognised VET as part of the senior secondary certificate and covers participation and training undertaken. Only summary information is included here on these aspects.

Since the introduction of VET into the senior secondary certificate, growth has been rapid. In 2003, there were 202 900² students enrolled in recognised VET subjects or courses undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate, representing 48% of all senior secondary students in that year.

The majority of the 202 900 students (65%) were enrolled in AQF certificate II, and a further 18% in AQF certificate I. Although currently there are no formal restrictions on the AQF level that can be undertaken within VET in Schools programs, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (2004) has recommended study at certificate I or II only.³

¹ Training packages are a set of nationally endorsed standards and qualifications for recognising and assessing people's skills. They are developed by industry with the aim of meeting the needs of an industry or group of industries.

² Although there may be some overlap, this figure does not typically include enrolments in school-based New Apprenticeships.

³ AQF certificate III is the typical qualification for an apprentice.

Benefits and outcomes

Recent research (Polesel et al. 2004; Malley 2001; KPA Consulting 2003; Barnett & Ryan forthcoming; Ryan 2002) has highlighted a range of benefits perceived by teachers and students as resulting from participation in recognised VET undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate, including:

- increased maturity, independence and motivation of the students involved
- increased opportunities to widen careers options and obtain workplace experience
- reduced absenteeism from school
- improved learning at school
- improved management in schools of diversity in student ability and post-school aspirations.

Data from the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth indicate that those who participated in school VET⁴ were more likely to attend a technical and further (TAFE) institute or be undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship than those who did not undertake school VET. A larger proportion of the latter went to university (see figure 2). However, the qualification profile of those who went on to VET is similar, irrespective of whether or not they had undertaken VET in Schools (see figure 3).

Figure 2: Student activities in 2002 by participation in school VET programs in proceeding years (preliminary findings)

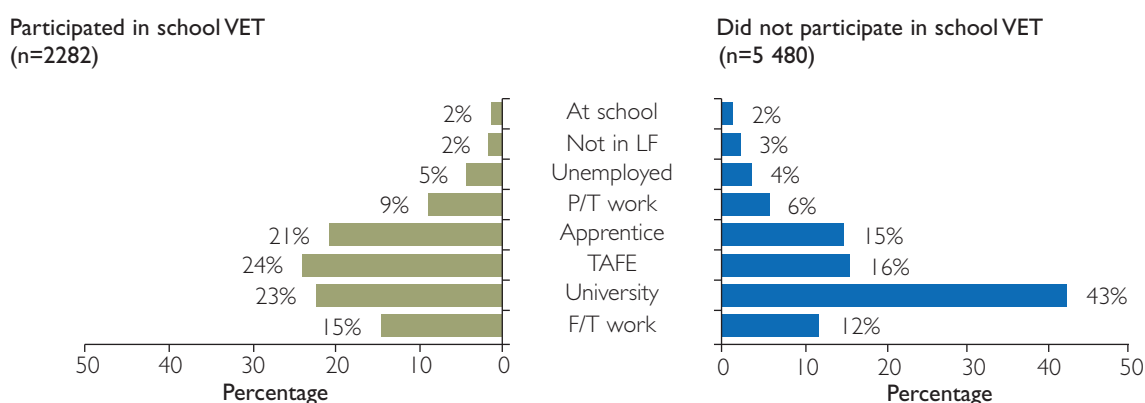
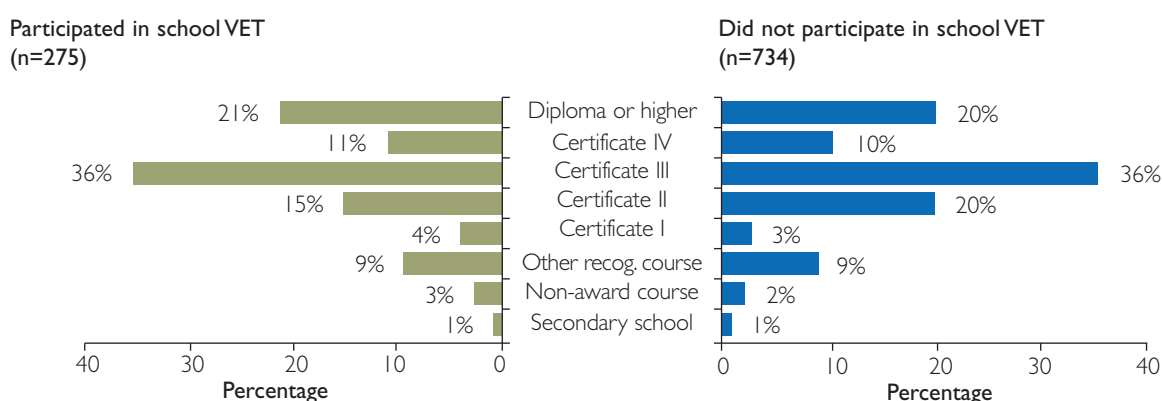


Figure 3: Level of qualifications studied by students in VET in 2002, by participation in school VET programs in preceeding years (preliminary findings)



⁴ The Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth may include school VET programs that are not recognised as part of the senior secondary certificate.

Research in rural areas also suggests that when the VET in Schools program is intended as a pathway to local employment, it is successful in retaining young people at risk of leaving school and in assisting them in the transition from school to work (Johns et al. 2004). However, those who did participate in recognised VET undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate in rural areas were no more likely to be employed than those who did not participate in the program.

Enablers and barriers

Box I shows the enablers and barriers to recognised VET subjects and courses undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate.

Box I: Enablers and barriers to implementing recognised VET subjects and courses as part of the senior secondary certificate

Enablers

- Structured workplace learning
- A strongly supportive principal and a team of dedicated VET staff
- A view that VET improves learning
- Proximity to TAFE and a good relationship with TAFE
- Time release for teachers to focus on administrative work
- The ability to offer courses on a cost-neutral basis or to charge students for courses
- High enrolments to give the school more 'buying power' when negotiating with TAFE to deliver courses

Barriers

- Costs of training teachers to meet Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) compliance
- Shortage of adequately trained teachers willing to accept the additional workload
- Adequacy of facilities to deliver VET within schools
- Costs of buying in provision from a recognised training provider
- Apparent inflexibility of school timetables
- Working or training during the holidays potentially affecting student wellbeing
- The quality of learning within schools questioned by industry and TAFE
- The quality of learning in structured workplace learning questioned by schools
- Parental attitudes to VET
- Resistance to VET among school personnel, and perceptions of VET as the 'soft option' among students and school personnel, although recent research suggests that these attitudes are diminishing
- Lack of careers advice that fully considers all the available VET options
- Students often lacking the independent study skills to participate effectively in TAFE
- Some universities not fully accepting of the competency-based assessment outcomes of VET subjects towards the university admissions index
- Curricula that meets both systems of education potentially restrictive of local experimentation in programs

Source: Barnett and Ryan (forthcoming); Polesel et al. (2004); Jung et al. (2004); Connell et al. (2003)

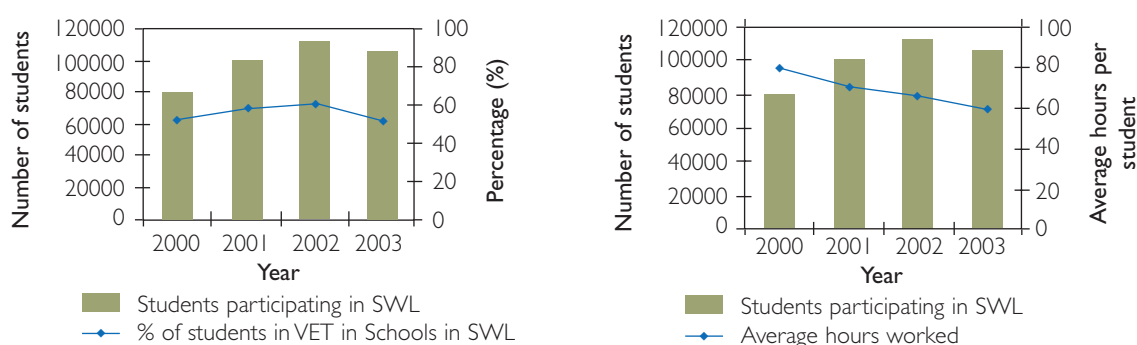
As box I demonstrates, there are many barriers to implementing recognised VET subjects and courses undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate. Barnett and Ryan (2004) group these into seven challenges. These include:

- attaining legitimacy
- curriculum, assessment and accreditation
- delivery
- workplace learning
- resourcing
- partnering and cultural difference
- perceptions of quality.

Barnett and Ryan (2004) suggest that the barriers should be viewed as a trade-off to the benefits. Furthermore, the identified enablers that contribute to implementing quality VET programs within the senior secondary school may help to address some of the barriers.

A critical identified enabler is structured workplace learning which provides real workplace and work experience and has been identified as a crucial mechanism for integrating vocational studies with general education and is central to students achieving the commonly reported benefits. Despite this, only 52% of the 202 900 students undertaking recognised VET subjects and courses as part of the senior secondary certificate were involved in structured workplace learning in 2003 (see figure 4). Furthermore, the reported average number of hours spent in structured workplace learning has decreased (see figure 4). Box 2 provides further information on structured workplace learning.

Figure 4: Participation in structured workplace learning



Source: The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Transition from School Taskforce 2004

Box 2: Structured workplace learning

Growth in structured workplace learning requires increased engagement with workplaces, locating structured workplace learning opportunities is often difficult, with demand potentially overwhelming for employers. The Allen Consulting Group (2003) suggests that, to meet the increase in demand, new models of structured workplace learning will need to be developed in conjunction with businesses.

A critical element to the continued growth of structured workplace learning is the identification of national approaches to enhance the quality of this type of learning. Through work commissioned by the Department of Education, Science and Training, KPA Consulting is currently investigating this further.

The enablers and barriers to quality structured workplace learning are identified below.

Enablers

- Improved stakeholder clarity about the purpose of structured workplace learning
- Effective relationships between individual schools and employers
- A dedicated coordinator

Barriers

- Inability to meet demand and the potential to over-approach employers
- Competition with other schools and TAFE
- Confusion amongst some employers about the concept of structured workplace learning and the assessment of competencies
- Little information available about why employers should participate
- Teachers often experiencing difficulty in visiting the workplace
- The attitudes of schools toward particular industries
- Variable placement quality

School-based New Apprenticeships

Although school-based New Apprenticeships also contribute to the senior secondary certificate, it is an option commonly undertaken by students aged 16 years and under, many of whom are in Year 11 and below.

Participation and training activity

In 2003, 12 300 students commenced a school-based New Apprenticeship. This is relatively small compared with commencements in recognised VET subjects and courses undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate.

In 2003, 76% of school-based apprentices and trainees were enrolled in AQF certificate II qualifications. Ninety-five per cent were undertaking a training package qualification (see Nguyen 2004, a companion piece to this publication, for further details).

Benefits and outcomes

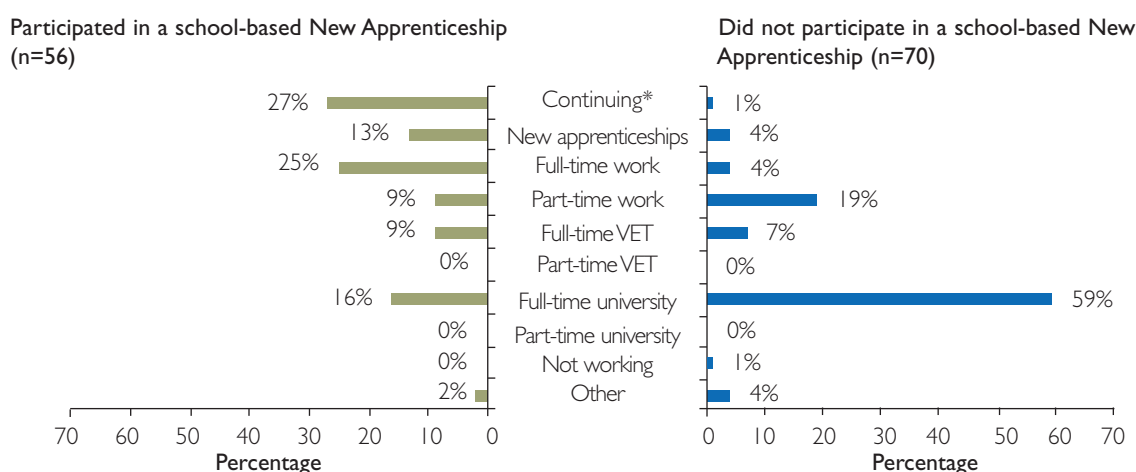
School-based apprentices and trainees experience similar social benefits to those reported in this publication for students undertaking VET in Schools subjects and courses. Therefore in this section, we focus on preliminary outcomes data.

School-based New Apprenticeship completion rates are not yet available as data collection only commenced in 2002. However, we know that 13% of school-based apprentices and trainees had cancelled or withdrawn by 31 December 2003.

Smith, Green and Hemmings (forthcoming) are investigating how experiences with the workplace during school affect post-school outcomes. Survey respondents were asked to report and reflect on all activities that involved engagement with the workplace while at school. The researchers compare the findings of young people who participated in a school-based New Apprenticeship (many of whom also reported being involved in work experience, work placement in a school VET course and paid work while at school) with young people who participated in work experience, work placement in a school VET course and paid work while at school but did not participate in a school-based New Apprenticeship. Preliminary results are included in figure 5.

The majority of school-based apprentices and trainees were in work and/or VET six months after school, while the majority of those who did not participate in a school-based New Apprenticeship were at university (see figure 5). The researchers note that the majority of the group who did not participate in a school-based New Apprenticeship were female and from non-government schools.

Figure 5: Major activities six months after leaving school (preliminary findings)



Note: * Refers to survey respondents who are continuing with the New Apprenticeship that they were undertaking while at school.

Enablers and barriers to school-based New Apprenticeships

Barnett and Ryan (2004) report a series of logistical problems associated with school-based New Apprenticeships. These problems commonly relate to insufficient time to participate in work-based projects, availability of students when they are required by employers, and student access to appropriate equipment and teachers with relevant industry experience. Some of these problems are common to all options within recognised VET undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate (see box 1). The enablers and barriers specific to school-based New Apprenticeships are outlined in box 3.

Box 3: Enablers and barriers to school-based New Apprenticeships

Enablers

- Strong student selection/recruitment process

Barriers

- Low awareness amongst businesses
- Number of hours worked low when compared with the hours undertaken by full-time apprentices and trainees
- Complex industrial relations system

Source: Jung et al. (2004) Smith and Wilson (2002); ANTA (2002a, 2002b)

VET alternatives to school—early school leavers

Commonly cited reasons for leaving school early are demand for work and income and/or school-associated reasons, such as academic failure, behavioural problems and poor relations with teachers and peers (Teese 2004; Wyn, Stokes & Tyler 2004).

Research identifies a range of factors associated with early school leaving (Teese 2004; McMillan & Marks 2003).

- Low-level literacy and numeracy achievement is associated with early leaving.
- Parental background—non-professional occupations and lower levels of education—is associated with early leaving.
- Males have higher rates of early school leaving.
- Students in rural or remote areas have higher rates of early school leaving.
- Indigenous Australians have the highest rates of early school leaving.

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum (2004) indicates that early school leavers are more likely to experience a troubled transition to employment or further study than school completers, and Teese (2004) reports that early school leavers have a high likelihood of unemployment. Many early school leavers attempt to improve their prospects by participating in VET.

Participation in VET

There were approximately 90 000 15 to 24-year-olds who left school in 2002, prior to completing Year 12. Of these, 38% of the Year 10 or below completers and 36% of the Year 11 completers were enrolled for study in 2003 at TAFE or other educational institutions such as business colleges or industry skills centres (derived from ABS 2003 in Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2004). Teese (2002) finds that within three years of leaving school early, between two-thirds to three-quarters have some contact with VET.

There are several options available to the early school leavers enrolling in VET. Wyn, Stokes and Tyler (2004) indicate that TAFE and adult and community education (ACE) provide re-entry programs that enable young early school leavers to reconnect with their education and develop pathways to higher levels of qualifications.

Pre-apprenticeships were traditionally an important avenue for early school leavers wanting to attain an apprenticeship or traineeship. This option is still available. However, the introduction of VET within the senior secondary certificate coincided with a reduced interest and awareness of pre-apprenticeships. Box 4 provides more information on pre-apprenticeships.

Finally, VET provides an alternative to Year 12 for some early school leavers. In examining this option, Karmel (2004) suggests that the Year 12 retention rate may not be an adequate measure of the success in providing young people with a sound educational foundation, suggesting that the focus needs to be broadened to include participation in both school and VET. He also suggests that an alternative measure of the educational success of young people should take account of part-time study and include young people to the age of 25 years. In this way it is possible to accommodate gap years and the mix of education and work activities that occurs.

Certificates I and II may be more important in providing an entry into higher-level qualifications than an entry point to employment. The National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) is currently investigating the outcomes to certificates I and II (Stanwick & Guthrie forthcoming).

Table 1 shows the highest VET qualification attempted in 2003 for persons aged 15–24 years who left school in 2002. As can be seen, those who left school after only completing Year 9 or 10 are more likely to be studying in VET at AQF certificate I and II. For those who complete Years 10 and 11, there is greater participation at AQF certificate III.

Table 1: Highest qualification attempted in 2003 by highest school level completed for persons aged 15–24, who left school in 2002, Australia (%)

	Males				Females			
	Year 9 or lower	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 9 or lower	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Diploma or higher	0.9	1.4	3.3	26.1	0.5	1.4	3.4	27.5
Certificate IV	1.2	2.7	4.9	16.4	1.0	4.4	6.3	16.3
Certificate III	16.5	42.9	43.9	30.9	11.7	36.2	35.1	30.6
Certificate II	37.1	26.9	23.3	13.0	48.8	37.4	33.1	16.0
Certificate I	27.2	12.8	11.4	3.4	21.2	6.3	4.5	1.3
Secondary education	0.7	1.7	3.3	0.7	0.3	4.0	7.0	0.7
Non-award courses	1.9	2.1	1.7	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.3	1.4
Other education	13.3	9.1	7.2	7.0	13.2	7.4	7.2	5.5
Subject only—no qualification	1.6	0.6	1.0	0.4	1.6	0.8	1.2	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Derived from the NCVER National VET Provider Collection 2003, adjusted for unknowns to 'highest school leaver'.

Box 4: Pre-apprenticeships

Pre-apprenticeships are typically not available in schools. However, an exception to this is in Queensland where a high number of enrolments occur in schools.

Pre-apprenticeships differ from New Apprenticeships in that they are not work-based and require extensive off-the-job training; they differ from other pre-vocational courses in that they involve training in a specific apprenticeship area. Despite several decades of operation, Dumbrell (2003) reports that the level of awareness and participation in pre-apprenticeships has declined in recent years following the expansion of VET within schools. He indicates that pre-apprenticeships can potentially assist in addressing participation in traditional trade training, skills shortages, youth unemployment and withdrawal from education and training at an early age.

Current issues

There is widespread criticism regarding the provision of school VET programs as a substitute for pre-apprenticeships. Training providers indicate that young people typically lack the mechanical knowledge, exposure to common hand tools and the mathematical skills required in many trade areas. They perceive that pre-apprenticeships could address these limitations.

There is also concern regarding the quality of careers advice being provided by schools. Dumbrell (2003) found that the majority of pre-apprenticeship students reported receiving information on the option through friends or advertising external to schools. Furthermore, many students expressed concern in relation to the lack of financial support available.

Source: Dumbrell (2003)

Enablers and barriers to quality VET programs for early school leavers

Wyn, Stokes and Tyler (2004) report that TAFE and ACE re-entry programs are successful because they are relevant to young people and their individual goals and circumstances, and because they are integrated with community networks and support agencies. They also indicate that the teachers employ student-centred approaches to learning and students particularly value the flexible delivery and timetabling which enables them to balance study with other activities.

While TAFE and ACE can offer a positive alternative to the traditional school-based post-compulsory education model, Wyn, Stokes and Tyler (2004) indicate that there is a 'vacuum' in education policies and programs to assist early school leavers to return to education. Most successful programs depend on the goodwill and personal qualities of the TAFE and ACE staff. Similarly, Polesel et al. (2004) report that TAFE teachers believe that VET has a role to play for early school leavers but that TAFE is not adequately funded to meet their needs. The teachers explained that TAFE cannot always provide the relevant pastoral care, appropriate levels of supervision and the classroom environment for young school-aged people. They argue that if TAFE teachers are expected to work with early school leavers, then, for these cases, they should be funded at the same level as schools. These themes are reflected in box 5.

Box 5: Enablers and barriers to quality VET programs for early school leavers

Enablers

- Flexible modes of delivery
- Quality instructional experience—good relationships between students and staff and quality teaching
- Opportunities to develop personal autonomy
- Student-centred teaching, such as self-paced learning and opportunities for one-on-one tuition
- Content relevant to young people
- Small class sizes
- Manageable programs (modules) balanced with group work
- Adult settings where young people are treated with respect
- Accommodation of social problems such as homelessness

Barriers

- There is no systematic approach across VET providers to cater for early school leavers.
- TAFE does not have the resources and experience to work with school-aged people.
- TAFE may not be an appropriate environment for the very young early school leavers.
- The range of programs for early school leavers has narrowed in recent years.
- Behavioural problems may disrupt adult learners.

Outcomes to participation in VET

Teese (2002) reports that early school leavers have a positive view of the vocational value of VET across a range of objectives. These objectives include skills development, employment, career growth and access to further study. Teese also reports that early school leavers gain significant social benefits from VET. These include improvement in ability to communicate, in the perception of the relevance of lifelong learning and in self-esteem.

Conclusion

The research suggests that recognised VET undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate is growing in importance, and that school students gain many social benefits, particularly through formal learning in the workplace. However, there are still many issues related to the implementation of VET within schools. These can be grouped into three key challenges; namely, differences in perceptions about the value and quality of the VET being delivered, delivery issues, and resourcing challenges. Improved collaboration between schools, VET institutions and industry may address some of the differences in perception and reduce the strain on schools in resourcing and delivering VET. These players also need to work together to address the apparent narrowing of options for early school leavers.

Suggested directions for future research include the tracking of the destinations of young people aged 15–24 years to provide a more definite picture of the success of school VET and to provide an accurate national account of the educational foundation of both early school leavers and senior secondary school completers. Research in progress includes the examination of successful models of structured workplace learning (KPA Consulting forthcoming) and reports on the outcomes and the destinations in the short term of young people who participated in school VET, school-based New Apprenticeships and certificates I and II (Anlezark, Ong & Thomson forthcoming; Smith, Green & Hemmings forthcoming; Stanwick & Guthrie forthcoming).

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