VET in Schools

A post-compulsory education perspective

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Publisher's note

For additional information relating to this research, please see *VET in Schools: A post-compulsory education perspective – Support document.* It can be found on the NCVER website <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr1029s.htm>.

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Executive summary

In the context of significant growth in the provision of VET in Schools programs in the past decade, this study sought to investigate the place of vocational education and training (VET) in school culture and policy. The study examined the consequences for students of supportive and negative school cultures in terms of access to VET while at school, attitudes to lifelong learning, self-confidence, and knowledge of employment and training options. A further component of the study was to look at the provision of VET for young people through the perspective of TAFE institutes. The study gathered information from twelve schools and six technical and further education (TAFE) institutes in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. The school data represented the views of over 300 teachers, over 1100 Year 11 students and over 400 exit Year 12 students. VET in Schools herein refers to accredited VET delivered to students in Years 11 and 12 as part of their Higher School Certificate (HSC).

The role of VET in Schools

In most of the schools in the study, it was generally agreed that VET plays an essential role in making the curriculum inclusive of a broader range of needs.

VET was also viewed as a useful means of improving learning and giving many students a chance of success at school, some experiencing it for the first time.

Factors contributing to effective VET programs

The development of good VET programs was seen by teachers to depend on both attitudinal change (among staff and the school community) and structural change (in the school's operation). Schools which were able to achieve change at both these levels had a number of characteristics in common:

✧ a strongly supportive principal

✧ time release to allow teachers to focus on the substantial administrative demands of VET

✧ the establishment of a *team* of dedicated VET staff, rather than individuals working in isolation

✧ high enrolments

✧ the ability to offer courses on a cost-neutral basis or to charge students for courses

✧ a view of VET as improving learning

✧ a positive, modern view of VET

✧ proximity to a TAFE

✧ a good relationship with TAFE.

Barriers to VET

Although some evidence of resistance to VET was observed among school personnel, issues associated with the adequate resourcing of VET programs seemed to be more important. Factors which limit the ability of schools to provide high-quality programs and/or expand existing provision include:

✧ a shortage of adequately trained teachers prepared to accept the additional workloads associated with VET teaching

✧ costs associated with training teachers to the standards needed to meet Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) compliance (including time release for industrial experience)

✧ provision of adequate facilities for delivering VET within the school (and the costs associated with updating inadequate facilities or building new ones)

✧ costs of 'buying in' provision from a TAFE (or other) provider

✧ fees charged to students.

Consultations and survey findings indicate a sea change in schools

Resistance to VET in Schools programs remains among some teachers. There is a view among some in the more academically inclined subject departments that VET is disruptive, that it does not fit easily into the timetable, or that it is simply not needed. In the schools in this study however, these teachers seem to be in the minority. For most, VET plays an essential role in managing diversity, in improving learning and in securing a range of good outcomes for school leavers. Even among non-VET teachers, there is a majority view that VET is needed and is effective.

Among students also, VET is seen as providing essential opportunities and pathways. Alternatives to the traditional pathway to university are provided in VET programs and offer young participants in these programs a senior schooling experience which caters for their diverse needs and learning styles. It would seem that students, if they choose not to do VET, do so because it does not fit their view of an academic trajectory, rather than because they view it negatively.

The feedback from TAFE staff seems to confirm these views. There is an acknowledgement that schools and students are beginning to view VET (and consequently TAFE itself) in a more favourable light. By appreciating VET, schools are also paving the way for a more positive view of TAFE as a post-schooling option.

Yet, despite these changing views, problems remain. These seem to be problems rooted in the institutional structures of schools and in the financial arrangements which constrain the relationship between the sectors. All of the stakeholders have focused on the financial difficulties involved in accessing VET in Schools programs. The vexed relationships between individual schools and individual TAFE institutes urgently require resolution of the institutional arrangements which make productive and efficient cooperation so difficult. From the students' point of view, the financial demands of VET (often most prevalent in those schools with the least capacity to address them) make access to programs which can improve both the schooling experience and the prospect of future pathways more difficult.

Institutional arrangements relating to access to senior secondary VET curriculum and accreditation arrangements are somewhat different from state to state. Yet, in the schools in the three states chosen for this study, the themes which run through this report are common ones. While both TAFE institutes and schools have done much to accommodate the need for high-quality VET programs for school students, many issues need to be addressed. The imperative for funding and administrative flexibility is chief among them. While access to VET remains complex and

troublesome, residual resistance to VET will remain, and some students who are most likely to benefit from VET programs, including early school leavers, will continue to miss out.

There is a need for a frank appraisal of the issues facing schools in different settings if they are to offer high-quality VET programs to all students who require them. These issues include access to TAFE programs, funding arrangements, school size, isolation, and the provision of trained teaching staff. These issues all involve funding and affect different schools in different ways. Unless adequate acknowledgment of the need to provide high-quality VET in a range of settings (and not just in those where it is easy) is made, access to VET will continue to be constrained for many young people in Australian schools.

There is also a need to move beyond institutional considerations and acknowledge that ultimately, it is the student, whether located in a school or in TAFE, who must be the focus of policy. It is the student as a client whose best interests must be determined in the provision of accessible and suitable options.

This is nowhere more apparent than in relation to early school leavers. Discussion with teachers reveals that many feel the range of programs which cater for this group has narrowed in recent years and they feel they do not have the experience and resources to deal with the specific needs of early school leavers. The interviews with TAFE staff reveal that, while they consider VET has an important role to play for early school leavers, TAFE is not funded to deal with them. Moreover, some TAFE teachers questioned whether TAFE was the right environment for very young students (aged 13 and 14 years), given issues related to pastoral care and supervision of minors.

Introduction

Background

Major growth has occurred in the number of young people undertaking vocational education and training (VET) programs in schools. Over 80 000 school students were enrolled in the VET sector in 1998 and considerable growth may be assumed since that time (National Centre for Vocational Education Research [NCVER] 1999). While growth has been considerable, overall levels of participation mask important differences in access to school-based VET, in quality, and in the impact of VET in Schools on employment and further education transition. For example, rates of participation in school-based VET in Victoria vary from as high as 15.2% in Gippsland to as low as 6.4% in the inner-eastern suburbs of Melbourne (Polesel & Teese forthcoming). In some regions, low participation in VET reflects a strong academic emphasis in schools serving high socio-economic status (SES) communities. But limited participation can also be found in regions of low status, where early leaving is high, academic attainment below average, and transition to university is for a minority only. Issues of school policy and school culture are of major concern in these contexts, as will be discussed further below.

Participation in VET beyond school also displays quite marked regional variations. In country areas, young people make greater use of VET than do young people in metropolitan regions. Transition to VET tends to offset typically high rates of early leaving from school (Teese 2000). Many early leavers in the country begin apprenticeships or campus-based VET from a platform of successful achievement at school, self-confidence as learners, and satisfaction with their experience as students. However, in urban regions of low socio-economic status, participation in post-school VET is merely average and does not counter school drop-out rates which are as high as in the country (Teese 2000). Early leaving is often followed by unemployment and no further education or training. When early leavers who have been low achievers at school do enter technical and further education (TAFE), their attitudes, classroom behaviour, and preparedness to learn often make them unwelcome. They may fail to complete a basic certificate, attend erratically, re-enrol in courses of the same level in order to qualify for income support, and derive little cognitive or economic benefit from their experience. For such groups, entry to VET has come too late. VET should have been a positive framework for learning while at school rather than a failed safety net for low achievers after they have left school.

Access to VET in Schools programs and under-utilisation of post-school VET are related problems. Both have their origins in school policies and culture which see VET as a poor alternative to academic and general studies and generally as an inferior stream. Parents are often reluctant to have their children enrol in subjects of low prestige and uncertain outcomes. This tends to reinforce the doubts entertained by teachers about the suitability of VET, either from an economic perspective (doing VET may block the road to university) or from a cultural perspective (doing VET is too educationally narrow). An Australian Research Council project found that, in 1998–99, over half of all upper secondary school teachers in Australia either doubted the value of VET or were opposed to its place in school programs (Polesel & Teese forthcoming). The conservatism of even poor families towards VET, based on insecurity, negative prestige signals, and hopes of social advancement, and the conservatism of teachers (who do not want to sell students short) work together to impede the growth of VET in Schools or to restrict its role or limit access to it. One manifestation of this cultural impact is the sometimes nearly exclusive focus of careers education and guidance on

university destinations, with little or no attention paid to VET, apprenticeship or employment for school leavers. A recent survey in Victoria found that, in a range of schools serving rural and low socio-economic status urban communities, high proportions of students reported receiving poor quality information about VET or receiving none at all (Polesel, Teese & O'Brien 2001).

Negative attitudes to VET can be expected to affect not only the level of provision of VET programs in schools and student access to them, but also the quality of programs offered (for example, in terms of teaching resources, facilities, work placements, TAFE links, and broadly, the extent of 'real commitment' and energy given to the VET area). Similarly, how schools operate their VET programs in the larger context of selection into the academic courses will also be affected. Finally, the place of post-school VET as an option for school leavers is likely to be limited where conservative academic attitudes prevail. Evidence of this can be seen in research for the Kirby review of post-compulsory education and training pathways in Victoria which found a systematic link between the likelihood of Year 12 students applying for VET as their first preference and the level of their academic attainment (Kirby 2000). As results fell, first-preference applications for VET rose. This underlying negative orientation to post-school VET was also confirmed by the comparative likelihood of students rejecting a TAFE offer. This was twice the rate at which university offers were turned down by students.

Purpose of the study

This project is an investigation of the place of VET in school culture and policy. The aim is to elucidate the cultural conditions under which VET in Schools either thrives or fails. The project will identify the consequences for students of supportive and negative school cultures in terms of access to VET while at school (including work-based learning), growth of favourable attitudes to lifelong learning, self-confidence, knowledge of employment and training options, and transition to employment and further education.

While the main focus of the project will be on schools, a second strand will look at the provision of VET for young people through the perspective of TAFE institutes. Here the concern is with how TAFE sees its role in the context of the growing role of schools. This part of the project will investigate both tensions within TAFE and cross-sectoral tensions within VET regarding program responsibilities for young people, and the extent to which these tensions affect total access to VET, including range and quality of offerings.

Research questions

✧ What are the factors within a school culture which support a successful VET program?

✧ What cultural factors inhibit the successful development of VET options within school curricula?

✧ What do teachers think of VET and its place in school curricula? On the basis of what considerations—philosophical, factual—do they make their assessments of its importance? Do teachers in the same school tend to be united in their views and attitudes regarding VET, or is division more common and, if so, over what issues does division occur?

✧ In careers education and guidance, how well profiled are employment, apprenticeship and VET options? To what extent do schools communicate with TAFE institutes, other VET providers, and state training authorities in designing careers education and guidance programs? How do students rate careers education and guidance and to what extent do their assessments differ according to planned and actual destinations?

✧ In developing curriculum policy with respect to VET, do schools consider the post-school destinations of students? Are the views of students factored into the process of curriculum decision-making?

♢ How do regional TAFE institutes view the growth of VET programs in schools? Is there a sense of competition or one of cooperation? What is the experience of TAFE institutes in delivering VET to early school leavers? Is there a view that this falls outside TAFE's role, that it should be managed by schools (or adult and community education [ACE] providers), or alternatively, that TAFE should be involved with this group and is perhaps better placed to address needs? How active is the communication from TAFE institutes to schools? Do the institutes see school leavers as an important market, and if so, how do they endeavour to profile their programs to make them attractive to this client group?

Partnership arrangements

A partnership was formed between the Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Training (CPET) at the University of Melbourne and Sydney Institute of TAFE, Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE and Kangan Batman Institute of TAFE. The Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Training conducted the research and the TAFE institutes were asked to prepare position papers and provide data relating to their perceived role in catering for school leavers. The report was prepared by the Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Training. The range of institutions ensured that a broad variety of relationships with the school community could be examined efficiently and effectively.

Methodology

The project was national in scope and involved 12 schools and six TAFE institutes across three states (New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland), representing characteristically different metropolitan, provincial city and rural settings. Schools and TAFE institutes serving low-to-average socio-economic status communities were targeted and schools with well-developed VET programs (as identified by system authorities), as well as those with little or no VET provision but serving similar communities, were compared. The methodology adopted for this study resulted in the selection of matched pairs of schools in each community. The aim was to include, in each location, a school with a demonstrated strong commitment to VET and one with a more limited VET program. The only exception was in Victoria, where three schools strongly committed to VET and only one with a more limited commitment adopted were selected. This was in order to provide some bias towards 'best-practice' schools. The categorisation of schools was based on information supplied by state education authorities, local TAFE institutes and Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) cluster coordinators, and on objective data on the breadth of the schools' VET programs. They were subsequently tested against more subjective interpretations of the schools' commitment to VET, as expressed by school staff in the fieldwork, and where the categorisations were found to accord with the data derived from school sources. The process resulted in seven schools being assigned to the 'strong VET' category and five to the 'limited VET' category.

Pairs of schools were, in general, associated with a local TAFE institute. The 'matched settings' methodology enabled a comparative analysis of prevailing school staff and management attitudes to VET, the place of VET in the curriculum, resource allocation, the staffing of VET programs, and the relative emphasis on this side of the school's mission and its perceived importance. At the same time, attention was paid to the other side of the local VET equation—the regional TAFE provider—to identify the nature of relationships with schools, school teachers, school students and early leavers. The values, attitudes, experience and destinations of students were studied through classroom surveys, focus group discussions, and a telephone tracking instrument. The project aimed to build up a picture of the options which students would wish to see in the curriculum as well as their needs and priorities—and experience on leaving school—and at the same time to profile the school's experience of VET and how this is expressed in the curriculum actually available to students.

Structure of report

A literature review, which offers a summary of recent research on VET in Schools, is presented in the next chapter. This review looks at the salient questions of participation and outcomes. The subsequent chapter examines findings of data collected during visits to 12 schools in the three states targeted in this study. The data presented in the three reports commissioned from the research partners are used in the chapter 'The TAFE view', while the following two chapters are based on the data collected through the teacher and student surveys respectively. The next chapter reports on the student destinations data and the final chapter presents conclusions from the project framed according to the study's underpinning research questions.

The appendices of this report are contained in a separate support document available at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr1029s.pdf>. They include a paper summarising the main issues for schools and TAFE, the full text of the three papers commissioned from the research partners and the research instruments used for the project.

Review of the literature

VET in Schools is possibly the most substantial change which has occurred in post-compulsory schooling in the past decade. It emerged in the early 1990s as a major piece of curriculum reform, with the principal aim of providing greater breadth of choice to the more diverse populations making use of senior secondary schooling. In practice, this meant introducing relevant and viable pathways for students not intending to apply for university, and increasing retention of students at risk of early leaving. Since its inception, there has been significant expansion in the numbers of young people participating in VET in Schools programs. This review summarises recent research on VET in Schools, addressing key questions about participation and outcomes.

Participation

Since the early 1990s, major growth has occurred in the number of young people undertaking VET programs in schools. In the early 1990s, for instance, about 13% of Year 11 and 12 students participated in some form of vocational education. Since the mid-1990s, when major reform of vocational education took place, participation has expanded significantly. Between 1996 and 2000, this proportion grew from 16% to 38%, or 153 616 enrolments (Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA] 2001).

Associated with this growth is the increase in the number of schools offering VET programs, from 1441 in 1997 (70% of secondary schools) to 1787 in 1999 (85% of secondary schools) (Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2001). Malley et al. (2001) point out that, while the number of schools offering VET has increased substantially, the number of enrolments within each school has increased only slightly. These figures suggest that increases in student enrolment are based on increasing school participation rather than increasing enrolments within individual schools.

As VET in Schools continues to evolve, further increases in participation are likely. One recent development which may increase enrolments is the establishment of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, which provide an opportunity to gain a recognised VET qualification while working part-time and studying towards the senior school certificate. The appeal of VET subjects is likely to be further enhanced by recent changes in accreditation arrangements, such as some VET studies being included in the calculation of Year 12 tertiary entrance rankings. A national study currently being undertaken by the University of Melbourne on behalf of the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation will shed further light on the impact of changes such as these.

Data from Victoria (Polesel et al. 1999) document the extent to which VET in Schools offerings grew over the period 1994 to 1997, from the original three certificate areas of office administration, electronics and hospitality to include 19 certificate areas representing most industry areas. By 2001, the number of certificate areas available in Victoria was at least 24 (Polesel & Teese forthcoming). The development of areas as diverse as agriculture, food processing (wine) and horse studies demonstrates the responsiveness of schools to student needs and interests, as well as to local industry opportunities. In recent years, the numbers enrolled in information technology followed by hospitality and office administration have overtaken all other certificate areas. However, taken together, these three certificate areas now account for only 51% of enrolments, compared with the

situation in 1997, when they accounted for 60% of enrolments (Polesel et al. 1999). This would seem to be indicative of increasing diversity in VET in Schools offerings.

According to Lamb, Long and Malley (1998), access to school-based VET varies considerably by state, school sector, and region. The remainder of this section reviews literature which addresses differences in VET participation according to achievement, socio-economic status, type of school attended, gender, ethnicity and geographical region.

School sector

Government schools have dominated VET provision since its inception in the early 1990s. At that time, 80% of VET participants were enrolled in government schools (Lamb, Long & Malley 1998). Students in government schools enrol in vocational courses at about twice the rate of Catholic school students, and almost four times the rate of independent school students (Lamb & Ball 1999). Data consistent with these figures are given by Malley et al. (2001) who found that, by 1998, 37% of all Year 11 and 12 students in government schools participated in VET programs, compared with 22% of Catholic school students and 14% of students in independent schools.

By the end of the decade, however, independent schools had substantially increased their share of VET provision. Within a context of increasing provision generally, government schools' share of enrolments dropped slightly from 82% to 74% between 1997 and 2000, while independent schools' share rose from 5% to 9%, and Catholic schools' share increased slightly from 13% to 17% (Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2001).

These differences between the school sectors may reflect different agendas. While private schools tend to focus on achieving high rates of entry to university, government schools are faced with the challenge of accommodating the needs of a more diverse student population. However, recent increases in VET provision in independent schools suggest that its role in that setting has become more acceptable. Anecdotal reports suggest that, apart from a strategy to address the needs of non-academic students, VET is also being used as a means of supplementing academic studies (for example, electronics to improve student performance in physics) or as a strategy to improve part-time work prospects for students who move on to university studies (for example, hospitality studies). These practices are examined in the following chapters.

Other school factors, such as size, also have a bearing on the quality and range of VET offerings, as well as staff resources and facilities. There is no available research which addresses this issue. Therefore, a priority of the current research is to identify the school characteristics which contribute to the success of VET programs.

Regional differences

Early studies on regional patterns of participation in vocational subjects realised equivocal results. Ainley and Fleming (1997), for instance, found that school–industry programs were more extensively provided by schools in provincial cities and country towns than in capital cities or rural areas. Lamb, Long and Malley (1998) examined data for young people who were secondary school students undertaking vocational subjects or units as part of Year 11 or Year 12 studies between 1991 and 1993. They reported very small differences based on rural or urban location, reporting slightly higher enrolments for urban males and rural females than for rural males and urban females.

Fullarton (2001) found that students in regional and rural areas were more likely to participate in VET in Schools, with one in four students participating compared with about one in five students in urban areas. Fullarton suggested that this may be due to the stronger social networks and closer school–industry linkages which exist in smaller communities.

It is apparent from these data that factors influencing VET provision and enrolments are far more complex than a simple distinction between rural and urban would allow. In analysing trends for the state of Victoria, Polesel, Teese and O'Brien (2001) were able to capture more of this complexity.

They found that VET in Schools enrolment rates tend to be highest in non-metropolitan areas and in those regions which have the lowest socio-economic profile and the poorest rates of transition from school to university. These results provide encouraging evidence that VET in Schools is able to offer opportunities to students who, in the past, were ill-served by a narrowly academic curriculum. Further analysis is needed of the types of VET programs available in different geographic regions and the regional factors influencing successful transitions to further study and employment.

Academic profile

VET in Schools programs appear to be targeted at students in the lower bands of school achievement. Fullarton (2001) examined data from a national sample of over 6000 young people who were in Year 9 in 1995. She found that 24% of students in the lowest achievement quartile (as measured by literacy and numeracy in Year 9) participated in VET in Schools in either Year 11 or 12, compared with 9% of those in the highest achievement quartile. This study also provided data on the proportion of VET and non-VET students in each achievement quartile: more than six in every ten VET students were located in the lowest two achievement quartiles, while fewer than two in ten were found in the highest quartile.

Similarly, Polesel and Teese (forthcoming) found that VET in Schools students are over-represented in the two lowest achievement quintiles and under-represented in the two highest quintiles, by comparison with non-VET students, who are evenly distributed across the five categories.

These data suggest that VET in Schools may have a role in the retention at school of lower achieving students at risk of early leaving. However, over the last decade, the proportion of students remaining at school in the post-compulsory years has been relatively constant, at about 80% for 16-year-olds and 60% for 17-year-olds (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001). These figures suggest that the growth in VET in Schools has not been associated with a corresponding increase in school retention, but has been sustained mainly by students who would have continued on in the secondary system in any case. These figures also indicate that VET, while primarily accessed by non-academic students, also appeals to students who are bound for university. Further research is needed to determine how different types of students make use of their VET studies, the extent to which VET in Schools meets the needs of students at risk of early leaving, and to identify strategies which successfully meet these needs.

Socio-economic status

Schools serving mainly low socio-economic status populations are more likely to offer vocational programs (Ainley & Fleming 1997) and students from low socio-economic ststus backgrounds are more likely to enrol in them (Lamb, Long & Malley 1998). Similarly, Lamb and Ball (1999) found that provision of school–industry programs in Years 11 and 12 was associated with low-ranked socio-economic status, with Year 12 students from low socio-economic status backgrounds enrolling in vocational education and subjects at about twice the rate of high socio-economic status students.

Lamb, Long and Malley (1998) found that Year 11 and 12 students participating in vocational programs were more likely to have attended government schools and come from home backgrounds where parents worked in skilled or unskilled manual occupations. Similar results were obtained by Fullarton (2001) who noted that students from manual or clerical backgrounds were more likely to participate in VET than students from professional backgrounds (27% compared with 14%).

Further research is needed to identify the types of VET programs which students from different socio-economic status backgrounds select, why they choose them, and what benefits they reap.

Gender

A number of studies have found that boys are slightly more likely to participate in VET in Schools programs than girls (Lamb, Long & Malley 1998; Lamb & Ball 1999; Fullarton 2001; Polesel, Teese & O'Brien 2001).

Lamb, Long and Malley (1999) cited rates of enrolment for boys in the group of subjects comprising technical drawing, technology, general maths and computing which were almost 12 times those for girls. Conversely, girls were most heavily over-represented in secretarial studies courses where their rate of enrolment was more than five times that of boys. Given that post-school VET has traditionally been highly gender segmented, these findings are no surprise.

Polesel and Teese (forthcoming) provide enrolment data for VET in Schools in Victoria broken down by gender for 24 certificate areas. Male enrolments comprised 54% of the total number of enrolments, and males outnumbered females in 15 of 24 certificate areas, indicating that males continue to be over-represented in VET studies. Strong gender segmentation was evident in patterns of enrolment choices. Areas in which male enrolments dominated most strongly were those associated with traditional male domains, such as electronics, construction, automotive studies, engineering and furniture studies. In these five areas, males comprised more than 90% of enrolments. Conversely, females comprised more than 90% of enrolments in three areas: clothing design and production, community services and horse studies.

Areas where male and female enrolments were more balanced (although still slightly male-dominated) included interactive multimedia, small business, agriculture, music industry skills, sport and recreation, desktop publishing, and food technology. These studies include several newly emerging areas, which, being less constrained by traditional gender expectations, may offer greater opportunities for male and female students to participate more equitably.

Overall, while male enrolment rates are marginally higher than those of female students, the considerable diversity in the range of program areas available has meant that VET in Schools has been able to accommodate girls as well as boys, although there are differences in the types of programs being accessed. Further research is needed to investigate the relative success of these programs in providing a bridge for students to work and further study, and to determine how these gender differences interact with socio-economic and ethnic factors.

Ethnicity

Fullarton (2001) reported that young people with a home background other than an English-speaking one were less likely to undertake VET in Schools: 24% of students with Australian-born parents participated in VET in Schools, compared with 18% of those from families from non-English speaking countries. These results are consistent with earlier studies (Lamb, Long & Malley 1998; Lamb & Ball 1999). For instance, Lamb and Ball (1999) found that vocational education and technology subjects were dominated by students from English-speaking backgrounds, whereas students from non-English speaking backgrounds tended to avoid technical, vocational and non-academic courses in favour of physical sciences, mathematics and business studies.

Lamb, Long and Malley (1998) noted that the rate of participation for girls from non-English speaking backgrounds was about five percentage points below that of girls from English-speaking origins, and concluded that ethnic background influenced VET participation of girls. These findings are consistent with the view that non-English speaking families place a stronger emphasis on university studies than Australian-born families, an issue which is explored in this report.

More research is needed on the impact of these views on transitions to further study and employment, particularly for those students who, although expected to go to university, do not get accepted.

The workplace experience

Structured workplace learning (SWL) is a key aspect of most VET in Schools programs. Structured workplace learning differs from the traditional work experience offered to Year 11 and 12 students in a number of ways. It is undertaken in an area of work specifically related to the VET area in which the student is enrolled, it is usually of a more extended duration, and it allows students to acquire skills and competencies in a workplace setting which are recognised and accredited as part of their formal studies. Its importance is highlighted by researchers such as Cumming and Carbines

(1997) who argue that it plays an important role in integrating the general and vocational components of the curriculum.

Polesel, Teese and O'Brien (2001) identified some important differences between structured workplace learning and work experience in terms of their perceived value to students. They compared the workplace learning experiences of VET students with those of non-VET students using data from a large sample of Victorian students, and found that structured workplace learning was superior on several counts. The VET in Schools group were more likely than the non-VET group to report that they had learnt key competencies, such as organising themselves better, meeting deadlines and working under pressure. VET students were similarly more positive than their non-VET counterparts about a range of other benefits delivered by their workplace training experience. They were almost twice as likely to describe it as a place where the work is related to what they learn at school, underlining how effectively VET in Schools programs forge the critical connection between workplace learning and school-based curriculum. The VET students were also more likely to describe their work placement as being related to the kind of job they would like to do, indicating a more careful matching of student aspirations with choice of workplace than seems to occur among the non-VET students.

It is not unexpected that the structured workplace learning available in VET in Schools programs targets students' interests more effectively than the work experience programs offered in generalist academic streams. However, what is notable is the range of measures on which VET workplace learning appeared to be the more effective alternative.

Outcomes

As discussed above, VET programs are intended to broaden the range of curriculum offerings and provide young people with an alternative pathway to work and further education. This section addresses the following question: To what extent do VET in Schools programs improve student outcomes?

The diversity implicit in VET programs requires caution when generalising about their impact. Sources of diversity include the range of industry areas involved in VET programs, the extent of structured workplace learning, and in the type of provision—some are provided entirely using school premises and teachers, while others involve resources shared with other schools, or provision by TAFE institutes and private providers. Another factor which suggests caution in attributing too much to the effect of VET participation on post-school destinations is the limited amount of time VET in Schools students actually spend in these programs, which Fullarton (2001) estimates to be about three hours per week on average. Another difficulty associated with attributing causality is that outcomes may simply reflect the abilities and preferences of students rather than the effects of participation in VET in Schools. These constraints should be kept in mind when interpreting results of research.

Lamb, Long and Malley (1998) examined outcome data for students who participated in vocational programs in the early 1990s. Students who studied vocational subjects at school were more likely to proceed into the post-school VET sector (53% of males and 51% of females) than those who did not study vocational subjects (43% of males and 35% of females). Male VET students entered apprenticeships at almost twice the rate of non-VET students while female VET students entered traineeships at twice the rate of non-VET students. VET students were far less likely to enter higher education than non-VET students, with the implication that VET in Schools is a pathway largely excluding university entry. This study also found that VET students were more likely than non-VET students not to have engaged in any further education by age 19 (37% compared with 28%).

More recent data from Victoria (Walstab et al. 2002) also suggest that participation in VET in Schools has a positive impact on students' choices to continue with VET. In this study, Year 12 VET in Schools graduates entered apprenticeships or traineeships at about twice the rate of

non-VET graduates. Given recent changes in accreditation of VET subjects, such as results in some VET subjects counting towards tertiary entrance rankings, this trend may change, with certain combinations of VET and non-VET subjects providing effective pathways to tertiary education.

Data from a series of destinations surveys conducted in Victoria (Polesel, Teese & O'Brien 2001; Polesel 2001) provide some more positive findings about post-school pathways of VET students.

Polesel (2001) reported on the impact of VET in Schools on post-school destinations in Victoria over a five-year period (1995–99). In broad terms, over half of the leaving cohort were consistently going on to further study at either a university or TAFE institute, with the majority of these students choosing to continue their schooling at TAFE. This was seen as demonstrating some progress towards the achievement of one of the aims of the VET in Schools programs, which is to stimulate interest in non-university training among secondary school students. Labour market transitions were also effective, with high rates of transition to full-time employment, and apprenticeships and traineeships.

Comparison of outcomes for VET and non-VET students of similar academic achievement revealed impressive results for academically weaker students. Polesel (2001) showed that for the academically weakest students, progression to further study was stronger for the VET group than for the non-VET group, with a much stronger transfer to TAFE. These results paint a promising picture of the role of VET in facilitating effective transitions to post-secondary education and training for these students.

In order to determine the effects of VET in Schools on employment outcomes, Polesel, Teese and O'Brien (2001) compared the destinations of the 1999 VET and non-VET students according to academic achievement. In the two lowest quintiles of achievement, the transition to work and further study appeared to be somewhat smoother for the VET students, with a higher proportion of the VET group working and a lower proportion unemployed.

Similar results were found in the most recent report from the series of Victorian destinations studies referred to earlier (Polesel & Teese forthcoming). This study found that the VET program works differently for students from different achievement profiles. For the academically weakest (and therefore most vulnerable) group, rates of progression to further study were stronger than for non-VET students. The transition to work was also smoother for VET students, of whom a higher proportion was working and a smaller proportion unemployed. In the highest quintile of achievement, overall rates of progression to tertiary education were strong for both VET and non-VET students, with VET students more likely to go to TAFE and non-VET students more likely to go to university. However, nearly two-thirds of VET students make the transition to university, and overall, four out of five are entering study in a tertiary institution. This is a noteworthy result considering the vocational nature of the program, and the high rate of participation of VET in School graduates in the labour market.

Supporting the data on outcomes for the most academically vulnerable students is recent research on the effect of VET programs on self-concept in low-achieving students (Kane & Warton 2002). This study found that school programs with an employment preparation orientation could be more effective than tertiary preparation programs in increasing the self-concept of these students. These findings are indicative of the role VET can play in increasing the self-confidence of learners and their future orientation to further learning.

Similarly, Lamb, Long and Malley (1998) compared outcomes for VET in Schools participants with those for early leavers. VET in Schools participants were, on the whole, more likely to enter some sort of further education or training than the early leavers. Early leavers were more likely to enter apprenticeships and certificate courses in TAFE, while VET in Schools students tended to move into traineeships and diploma courses. A notable exception was that female VET in Schools participants were more likely than early leavers to enter low-level certificate courses, a situation which raises some questions about the advantages for these students of remaining at school.

Gender differences

Lamb, Long and Malley (1998) found striking gender differences in the destinations of students who participated in vocational subjects in Years 11 or 12. Males were more likely to go into apprenticeships than females (22% compared with 2%) and females were more likely to enter traineeships (13% compared with 8%), study at diploma or certificate levels (37% compared with 22%) or proceed to higher education (21% compared with 9%).

Polesel and Teese (forthcoming) noted that, over time, gender differences in destinations of VET in Schools exiting students have shown consistent patterns, with proportionally more boys going into apprenticeships, and more girls going into traineeships and tertiary education (both VET and university).

Compensating for the higher proportion of girls entering tertiary studies, boys were far more likely to be located in the apprenticeship/traineeship category (24.6% of boys, compared with 12.6% of girls). Within this category, however, there were also large gender differences. Just under one-fifth (18.9%) of all male VET in Schools graduates entered an apprenticeship, compared with only 4.0% of all girls. Conversely, 8.6% of girls became trainees, compared with 5.7% of boys.

This study also found that the benefits accruing to VET graduates, by comparison with non-VET graduates, were consistent along gender lines, indicating that the advantages of VET in Schools study, as measured by higher rates of transition to TAFE and better employment outcomes, apply broadly to both gender groups. However, they note that, as for the data published for the 1999 cohort, the high rate of entry to TAFE for male VET in School graduates—a rate which brings the overall tertiary transition rate of VET in School boys to a level matching that of non-VET boys— was not matched by the rate for female VET in Schools graduates. While male VET graduates were only 4.5% less likely to enter tertiary study than male non-VET graduates, the difference between VET and non-VET girls was 8.7%.

Teachers

If there is a dearth of literature in the field of VET in Schools generally, then this is particularly true regarding the role of teachers working in such programs. There are examples of literature which deals with the issue of how teachers' roles are changing (Shaw et al. 1999) but these do not specifically address the context of VET in Schools in Australia. The debate over the recruitment and training of VET teachers, what incentives should be offered to address teacher shortages in the area and how issues of recognition of prior experience (for example, trade qualifications) should be approached, has only just begun in this country.

One of the few studies in Australia to address the issue of teacher training is a New South Wales project examining a course established to train VET in Schools teachers at Charles Sturt University (Green 2002). This paper reports on an innovative approach to training teachers which recognises the prior industry experience of practitioners and accelerates their progress through their studies. Combining innovative approaches to practicum experience and problem-based learning, the course has shown early success in retaining student teachers (low attrition) and in the positive feedback provided by schools on the trainee teachers.

Careers education and guidance

Related to the changing role of teachers and similarly under-researched, is the role of careers education and guidance for students who are not following the traditional route from senior secondary schooling to university. A recent English study notes that schools need to focus on the career needs of students who are in danger of dropping out or whose post-schooling pathways do not lead inevitably to university (Andrews 2000).

Similarly, recent research in Canada (Human Resources Development Canada 2000) argues that, while there has been a significant expansion of information and services about career choice, there is a need for a more coordinated systemic approach to providing information to young people about programs and services. Canadian initiatives to encourage employers to give work experience to young people and support for expanded careers and counselling programs in schools reflect these concerns. These initiatives have focused on raising awareness of the alternative pathways available in school with a view to increasing school retention (Crysdale, King & Mandell 1999). There is a recognition in such initiatives that the provision of vocational education and training in schools and the expansion of schools' roles in providing pathways for school leavers who wish to enter the workforce without further study requires schools to take a more inclusive approach to the provision of careers education and guidance services. Such services must now accommodate the needs and aspirations of students who are remaining at school but are not necessarily on a pathway to university.

Conclusions

The studies reviewed here indicate that VET in Schools offers a positive experience of training and workplace learning for participants, while facilitating effective pathways to post-secondary education, training and work. However, as discussed above, the significant growth in VET in Schools masks important differences in access to school-based VET, in quality of VET provision, and in the impact of VET in Schools on the transition to further education and employment.

Further research is needed to address issues associated with the quality of VET in Schools, in terms of teaching resources and facilities, teacher training, work placements and TAFE links. Questions which arise include the following:

✧ What factors restrict or enhance quality delivery?

✧ Is VET reaching all students who could potentially benefit from vocationally oriented programs?

✧ Is the range of VET offerings appropriate to the needs and interests of students?

✧ Are there any significant gaps in provisions?

✧ What of low-achieving students at risk of early leaving who may be 'falling through the cracks'?

✧ To what extent does the culture of the school, including teacher and parent attitudes, impact on the extent and quality of VET provision?

✧ To what extent is VET enhancing or extending students' career options?

✧ To what extent are VET enrolments and outcomes constrained by traditional gender expectations?

✧ How are schools coping with increased demands to provide a broader range of curriculum and careers options?

This study will report on the factors within a school culture which influence the success of VET programs and facilitate effective transitions into post-secondary training, education and employment pathways.

The school view

This chapter presents the findings of data collected during fieldwork visits to twelve schools in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. During these visits, principals, deputy principals, senior year-level coordinators, VET coordinators and careers teachers and advisors were interviewed about their views on the role and quality of VET programs in their schools.

Presenting the 'school perspective' on VET is rather like presenting an 'Australian perspective' on the republic. It depends who you ask. VET plays a variety of roles in schools, and its history, profile and status vary widely from one setting to another and, indeed, from state to state. This chapter examines the role which VET plays in a selection of schools, the ways in which it is perceived and the issue of resources (human and material). It attempts to do so with careful consideration of each school's context—state, local and historical—in order to highlight the range of issues relevant to the delivery of VET in Schools in a diverse federal system of secondary schooling upon which are overlaid attempts to impose the consistency of a national approach to training.

Role of VET in Schools

The perspectives provided by teachers and principals in these schools seem to point to vocational education and training in schools playing two main roles. These are the management of diversity and the improvement of learning. Both of these, in turn, have an effect on the school's ability to retain students, a third and consequential role assigned to VET by school staff.

Managing diversity

Managing diversity means, in essence, finding an appropriate location in the curriculum for every student. This is a task which can be quite different from one school to the next.

In many schools, the challenges of catering to a diverse clientele have been felt keenly. The inadequacy of the senior secondary curriculum was a recurring theme in the schools targeted for this study, as the two following statements, from New South Wales and Queensland respectively, demonstrate:

> Even with the old HSC [Higher School Certificate] … the subjects were suitable for only 50% of our candidates. They did not want TER [tertiary entrance rank]-band approaches …

> The school is still orientated towards OP [university entry] even though the students are not that academic … Education Queensland needs to look at staffing. There is no point trying to change policy or curriculum if you don't have the staff to deliver it.

For some schools, usually the most disadvantaged, the pressure to maintain student numbers can result in the unhappy combination of a clientele with diverse needs and a narrowly based academic curriculum. Typically, schools which, in the past, were able to shed 'non-academic' students and focus on the provision of a university-oriented senior secondary curriculum, now face declining student numbers (due to a maturing population or other demographic changes). Such schools find themselves faced with many students who require a broader curriculum (one which includes vocational options) but neither sufficient numbers to offer such a curriculum nor the expertise to find solutions to this problem.

One such state school, located in the suburbs of Brisbane, described these pressures thus:

> There is a huge rise in private schools too, which are taking the best students. The old academic mission was appropriate then but not now. The more able students are no longer here but the school adheres to the old mission. There is a fear that VET is a lot of work and it's scary. Principals are also trying to play down how much work is involved, rather than face what needs to be done. At the experienced VET schools, it will be easier to deal with the new AQTF [Australian Quality Training Framework] guidelines. At a school which is only just starting like (this one), it will be very difficult.

In other schools, the issue of a clientele with diverse needs was less important and, consequently, the role of VET was seen differently. In a middle-class school in Sydney's eastern suburbs, for example, there is little demand for VET in Year 12:

> There are not many VET subjects that are 2-unit and that 'count' toward UAI [Universities Admission Index]. So most kids will do 2 units of TAFE in Year 11 and do no VET in Year 12. Maybe 10 students each year will continue with a 2-unit non-Board developed subject in Year 12 because they want to go to TAFE, not university …

This is a school in which VET is a useful, but hardly essential, adjunct to the academic curriculum offerings. The principal focuses on the social benefits of the VET 'experience' and sees it as 'part of a wide curriculum' but does not offer a strong commitment to VET in Schools programs. The careers advisor comments that some kids see VET as 'recreation'. When asked to offer a judgment on the importance of VET, staff are careful to emphasise the 'life-broadening' aspects of VET study but reject any major role for VET in dealing with the broad needs of students:

> [We] do not see VET as a lifesaver for potential dropouts because it's only 2 units. It's such a small part of the curriculum that it does not really make a difference to kids who are not coping with school per se … If kids know they have to finish school, they will finish even if they only have the academic program on the menu.

Consideration of this particular view is useful, if only in that it alerts us to the wide attitudinal differences among schools. It must be remembered that there are many schools who consider themselves well served by the traditional university-entry curriculum. However, such views seemed to be the exception in this study. In most of the schools in our study, the consensus was that VET plays an essential role in making the curriculum inclusive of a broader range of needs. This was largely the case whether or not schools had experienced success in implementing VET programs. It was certainly the case even in various private schools and the more middle-class settings encountered in the study.

Improving learning

Improving learning was seen as a major benefit of VET in a number of settings. While the management of diversity was a major motivation for the introduction of VET in schools where many students were not regarded as candidates for university entry, improved learning was nominated as a benefit more generally applicable to a range of students. At a Catholic secondary school strongly committed to VET programs, the claim was made that VET makes learning more accessible:

> Many, through doing VET, experience success for the first time and then see themselves as academically able and able to go to university. No doubt those students will be successful at university. This argues for VET in its own right at schools, not just to get into TAFE …

The theme of VET being an end in itself, rather than a pathway to tertiary-level VET, was not uncommon. In one large regional school, approximately one-quarter of the senior secondary population was enrolled in at least one accredited VET unit—an impressive commitment to VET by any measure. Yet, fewer than 6% of Year 12 graduates from this school received a first-round offer at the local regional TAFE and only 6% more received offers at other more distantly located TAFE institutes.

In a suburban Victorian school, the point was made that VET takes the focus off narrow academic performance and invests resources in the development of work readiness and preparation for life more broadly. By building on the learning strengths of students, VET prepares young people to be successful lifelong learners. VET was also seen as building positively on prior learning:

> For students who are not academically focused—including those defined at risk at the Year 9 and 10 levels—the move to VET styles of teaching and learning (especially the emphasis on competency-based training) can make for new experiences of learning success. This is especially the case with the strong emphasis on recognition of prior learning built into many units—some students are very heartened to find not only how much they already know but how much it is valued.

There is also a view that students enjoy their VET learning—a point made in various settings. Assessment requirements are different and do not put students under the pressure of pass/fail arrangements. The flexibility inherent in the modular approach of much VET learning would seem to be an approach which suits many students.

A further advantage of VET mentioned in some schools was its ability to place students' thinking about careers into perspective. In one relatively conservative Catholic school, the deputy principal argued that all students should have access to VET and, particularly, to structured workplace learning, in order to help them appreciate the role of work and to reflect on careers.

A final point worth making here is that there is a perception that VET teaching is more accessible and attractive to students than much of the teaching which occurs in the mainstream, and that VET teachers are better teachers:

> Kids love going to TAFE for social as well as other reasons. The TAFE experience is a great milieu—adult experience, good equipment, more freedom. [It] is something we push. They are better at teaching than we are …

What is significant in much of this commentary is a perception of VET in Schools as useful and valuable in its own right—as a means to better teaching and learning, as a way of improving student motivation and morale and as a context within which to consider future careers. The implications of this for lifelong learning are evident. Students who become motivated to love learning (rather than seeing it as a unpleasant experience which they must terminate as quickly as possible) will be more likely to return to study or to continue their association with learning throughout their lives. Increasing the numbers of students going to TAFE is not necessarily the first priority for some schools. While this may be seen as important in some contexts, many schools show a willingness to separate the issue of VET as a tool for learning at school, and the issue of VET as a desirable tertiary option. Indeed, some schools explicitly cite VET in Schools as a means for improving students' chances of entering university.

How VET is seen

Views such as those expressed above suggest that changes have occurred in the way schools regard VET. Negative perceptions of VET have not disappeared, but increasingly, an acceptance of VET as an important tool in the management of diversity and as a means of improving learning has meant that objections have diminished. As our discussion in the previous section has shown, the difficult challenge of finding appropriate and relevant subjects and pathways for all students has meant that most schools have had to re-assess their curriculum offerings in general, and their VET offerings in particular.

Where resistance occurs, it seems to be concentrated in those schools most insulated from the demands of diversity, or in those subject departments most removed from the VET area (for example, English, history etc.).

For instance, in the schools with a more traditional focus on the academic curriculum (or in those where 'non-academic' students are not encouraged to stay), VET is less likely to be seen as a necessary curriculum option. If the majority of students are focused on academic pathways, there is a perception that there is little need for curriculum diversity and the incentives to tackle the hard work of implementing a major curriculum initiative such as this are simply not in evidence. However, even in these schools, there is a grudging acceptance that VET may be useful in dealing with the 'problem' students—those who do not fit into the school's academic profile. It would seem that only where the needs of students are diverse and pressing does the provision of VET take on a sense of real urgency.

Within schools, the conservatism of some subject departments is most often demonstrated in resistance to timetable or curriculum changes, or to the flexibility needed for aspects of VET to work successfully. For instance, if the provision of VET requires the removal or restriction of some of the more traditional subject offerings, there may be strong opposition. Similarly, the flexibility needed to accommodate structured work placements and workplace assessment (both from the VET teacher and VET student points of view) is sometimes resented by non-VET teachers. The removal of students from a non-VET class in order to attend such activities was the commonest objection put forward by non-VET teachers.

Lack of knowledge is another issue. Many teachers are unaware of or do not understand differences in accreditation and assessment as they relate to VET. They may be unfamiliar with the school's relationship to TAFE or unclear about students' attendance requirements at school, TAFE and the workplace.

While teacher resistance (and ignorance) continue in some circumstances, instances of innovative and strategic solutions were also in evidence. In one school where initial resistance from the academic subject departments was fierce, an advanced course in laboratory skills (certificate III level) was developed for students whom the principal described as 'not conventionally regarded as VET candidates—that is, high achievers'. This strategy had the effect of allowing the science department—a group not traditionally associated with VET—to invest in the school's VET program. In this way, the school managed to confer ownership of VET (and an interest in its success) upon a group who might have been expected to resist its implementation.

In many settings, however, objections of various kinds continued to emerge among both parents and teachers. A history teacher in a working-class Sydney school—a school otherwise well disposed towards VET—lamented the changes which VET was imposing and described it 'as a fad dictated from above'. In a similar school nearby, the principal acknowledged the value of VET in dealing with diversity but expressed concern at the labelling of western suburbs schools as 'trade schools'. Elsewhere, migrant parents strongly resist VET in the school curriculum, associating it with the blue-collar occupations to which they themselves have been relegated for so long. In one predominantly Anglo-Saxon working-class suburban school, the teachers argue that their success in promoting VET is linked to the nature of their clientele:

> This school community is comprised primarily of the Australian-born working class, often with a strong trades background. They do not have the university focus of the more recently arrived migrant communities, and are already (arguably) favourably disposed toward apprenticeships, TAFE and VET generally.

It seems evident that equating VET with trades in the thinking of many people continues to be widespread. If schools portray VET as inextricably linked to the traditional trades and thus to a contracting sector of labour market activity, the introduction of VET will meet strong resistance, regardless of the socio-economic profile of the school community. It may well be that perceptions of vocational education and training in schools will never change until a broader view of VET gains acceptance in the community—one which includes the technological, artistic and commercial fields which form an intrinsic part of modern VET studies.

There are also instances of positive parent attitudes. Teachers in one Victorian school noted that attitudes to VET changed dramatically when the parents of otherwise disaffected and disruptive students found that their child had 'miraculously' begun to settle at school after enrolling in VET. Parents who had believed that academic pathways were the only real options found that their kids were 'happy in school for the first time' after beginning a VET program. The real misfortune, claimed the staff, was that these positive views tended not to permeate into the broader school culture, but rather remained confined to the happy users themselves.

Consequently, the importance of promoting VET positively cannot be emphasised strongly enough. The role of the principal in this respect is crucial. While other factors such as the nature of the school's clientele, school size and parent expectations all impact on the acceptance of VET, the principal's support (or lack of it) was highlighted in many schools as making the difference between a successful VET program and an unsuccessful one.

The point was made in one school that the development of good VET programs depends on both attitudinal change (among staff and the school community) and structural change (in the school's operation). To achieve change at both these levels, it is not enough to have a good, committed VET coordinator. Rather what is needed is:

> … the solid weight of leadership support and determination. The principal needs to be wholly supportive. The VET coordinator alone cannot achieve these sorts of outcomes.

The reasons for this are that administrative, funding and teaching support are unlikely to be secured without the direct intervention of the highest levels of leadership. The innovative use of grant funds, time release to allow teachers to focus on the heavy administrative demands of VET and structured workplace learning and the construction of a 'team' of dedicated VET staff are all heavily dependent on the support of the principal.

Two outer suburban schools in different states serve as an example of contrasting leadership approaches. In the first, the principal is acutely aware of parents' conservatism regarding VET but is strongly supportive of VET programs. Despite concerns that staff are expensive to train and consequently more liable to be 'poached', the principal actively promotes VET among teachers and parents, both verbally and with funding support. The result is a VET program which plays a central role in the curriculum.

In the second school, a timid principal is reluctant to ask teachers to engage in the process of hard work required to establish VET programs. He is also unwilling to reduce the control exercised by the academic subject departments over resources in the school. This principal is also fearful that parents will object to paying levies or any extra costs associated with training. Thus, VET remains starved of funds and, consequently, of any status. Staff are adamant that the lack of progress in VET has one central cause—leadership:

> [The school] has been left behind because the principal refused to enter the competition. His conservatism on a range of fronts has meant that nothing has happened.

VET and the senior certificate

In each state an issue which impacts heavily on the acceptance of VET is the relationship between VET curriculum and the senior certificate. The status of VET is heavily dependent on the institutional value accorded to VET through recognition (or non-recognition) of the contribution of the VET subjects towards satisfying the requirements of the senior certificate and the calculation of a tertiary entrance rank.

The approaches taken by different states to these issues vary considerably and are inevitably complex—so complex in some cases that senior certificate students may be misled about the effect of some curriculum choices on their tertiary entrance rank outcomes. This report is not the place

for an analysis of the different states' regulatory approaches; however, a number of state-specific issues were raised by schools regarding the relationship between VET and the senior certificate.

In New South Wales, a number of the survey schools (some of them strongly committed to VET) note the difficulties of promoting VET in an atmosphere driven predominantly by *academic* success and achievement. Teachers report that, because only one subject can count towards the senior certificate/Universities Admission Index, a one-line timetabling approach in most schools prevents students from doing more than one VET subject in Year 12. As a result, most students in these schools will be unable to complete sufficient modules to be awarded a VET certificate and this becomes a further factor reducing the incentives for enrolling in VET. Furthermore, since higher school certificate subjects may not be taken by students in Year 10, there is a barrier to access to accredited VET for younger students, many of whom are regarded as potentially benefiting from more practical and experiential approaches to learning.

In Queensland, anomalies also exist. In that state, VET subjects count towards the senior certificate but it is possible to complete these subjects without assessment of the attached competencies. This was of concern to some staff who regarded this as 'watering down' the VET curriculum, since the VET units would count towards the senior certificate, but, stripped of their competencies, could not be used as credits towards a VET qualification. In Queensland also, as in New South Wales, students may not enrol in VET in Schools subjects which count towards the senior certificate while they are in Year 10.

In Victoria, VET in Schools modules are available to students in any year of their secondary schooling, thus allowing them to gain 'advanced standing' with regard to both their VET qualification and their senior certificate qualification. However, in the Victorian context, a different concern was raised. There was a belief among some teachers that the strong integration of VET and the senior certificate had resulted in some senior certificate VET programs being too difficult for some students. While VET was seen as serving the needs of the majority of students, the demand for VET programs which also met the 'standards' of mainstream Victorian Certificate of Education programs was regarded as having made these subjects inaccessible to students who struggle with traditional academic styles of learning. Recent moves to introduce study scores in VET subjects were seen as intensifying the pressure on these subjects to meet the needs of the academic curriculum rather than the needs of a broad range of learners.

Resourcing VET in Schools

The resourcing of VET involves both the provision of adequately trained teachers and the availability of facilities appropriate for the delivery of industry-recognised training (or the ability to buy such training from an outside provider, such as TAFE). On both these fronts, schools are aware of severe shortcomings, although it must be emphasised that the nature of the problems varies in different schools and depends on factors such as their ability to charge students for services and their own ability as schools to fund VET programs.

The particular difficulty of finding (and keeping) suitably trained teachers, however, is an example of an issue which seemed to affect all sites, regardless of their level of resources. In the broader context of a worsening teacher shortage across Australia, schools reported difficulties in finding trained and accredited VET teachers. Adding a sense of crisis to the situation are the newly implemented Australian Quality Training Framework requirements that teachers delivering Australian Qualifications Framework-accredited content must have industry experience (minimum 40 hours) and relevant qualifications (Australian Qualifications Framework level IV).

A range of incentives by state education departments to deal with these needs was reported. For instance, in Queensland, teacher training recruits with industry experience are accorded recognition of prior learning (RPL) which effectively takes one year off their degree training. A similar scheme operated in Victoria in the past, but this has now been discontinued and the Higher Education

Contribution Scheme (HECS) is seen as a disincentive to enter teacher training. In New South Wales, it was reported that schools with teachers wishing to gain industry experience are fully funded to release them for this purpose.

However, the vast majority of staff interviewed in this study reported ongoing severe problems in this area. In Queensland, virtually every school in the study raised the issue of industry experience as an unaffordable cost associated with the provision of VET in Schools. These schools made it clear that they could not afford to release teachers for this purpose and that teachers were not willing to gain this experience in their own time. In some cases, compromises had been reached, with schools reimbursing teachers for a proportion of their time.

In New South Wales, despite the availability of fully-funded time release, many teachers were reluctant to gain accreditation because of a perception that VET-associated roles were more work-intensive than other teaching roles. There was a perception that industry visits, coordination of structured workplace learning and heavy assessment and reporting requirements (often to different authorities), in addition to actual teaching, placed a significantly higher burden of work on VET teachers than that experienced by their other colleagues.

Staff know the workload in VET is huge: it involves retraining to get an Australian Qualifications Framework level IV qualification, being out of the school to deal with work experience placements and the huge paper work burden:

> We actually had a Business Studies teacher who refused to update his qualifications because, if he did update, he would have to teach VET and he wanted to opt out.

The extent of this problem may become more evident when the research team surveys teachers in a later stage of this project, but the New South Wales Department of Education and Training statistics were quoted indicating that, despite 3500 teachers having been trained in that state, only 60% were working in the VET area.

In the area of facilities, the situation was somewhat more variable. The availability of adequate facilities seemed to depend largely on the school's previous history. Some old technical schools had well-resourced workshops or kitchens. One, in Melbourne's outer suburbs, had retained much of its VET infrastructure and staff, and now finds that its 'strong culture of technical studies' serves it well. Perceptions also depended on the school's ambitions. One school in New South Wales, which offered little VET and had very modest ambitions to do so, declared itself satisfied with its VET facilities.

Others, which were eager to expand their offerings and had strong demand for VET, bemoaned their ageing resources or pointed to the fact that their kitchens were of domestic rather than industrial quality and therefore inappropriate for the teaching of hospitality. Again, the expense of updating aged facilities or building new ones was often weighed against the need to fund non-VET facilities (science laboratories, music facilities etc.) and the tenor of the resulting debate would usually depend on the level of support available to VET in that school.

Also weighing into this debate were the counterbalancing costs and savings of 'buying in' provision from a TAFE (or other) provider. This relatively simple solution—outsourcing VET—comes at a cost. The need for TAFE institutes to recover costs means that charges are passed onto the school (or directly to the student). In some cases, state governments will provide funding for 'taster' courses. Such funding, allocated to the TAFE institute, will allow the provision of a certain number of places per school in such courses. Places are usually allocated according to the level of school interest and individual schools have some discretion as to how the funding may be used. For example, a school which has been allocated funding for 12 places in a course may decide to send 24 students and charge each student 50% of the costs, thus broadening access but requiring a contribution from the user.

These taster courses, however, have limited usefulness from the school's point of view. Usually confined to one or two modules, they serve only as an indication of the kinds of VET offerings available and may stimulate interest in VET programs. However, they have only a limited role in

the provision of an integrated VET program in schools. Schools requiring a course from TAFE which leads to a VET in Schools qualification (usually certificate I or II) will normally be required to pay fees.

It is in this area that schools are very differentially placed to access such services. The first and most obvious obstacle to such access is distance. Schools located too far away from a TAFE provider face the barriers of cost and time. Time spent travelling to a TAFE location and the costs of transport (often for a very small number of students) can remove this option from consideration, as one school in a regional location noted:

> The school cannot access TAFE, as it is too far away (45 minutes by bus). There is no point TAFE telling us they should teach all the VET (rather than us teaching it) because they cannot guarantee a course from one year to another. And it is too expensive and too time-consuming to travel there …

Another barrier is the cost of courses. Again, this impacts differently on different schools. A number of private schools in our study made it clear that the costs of VET, which were additional to the fees students paid, were passed on directly to students. In this way, the outsourcing of VET was cost-neutral to the school. Similarly, in some government schools, it was felt appropriate to charge the students on a user-pays basis. In other schools, some contribution might be allocated from within the school global budget, but such situations were rare.

In the case of one resource-poor school in Queensland, the costs of VET were such that the school was at risk of losing even the limited VET programs it had. In this school, individual students could not afford to pay any fees which TAFE charged due to their economic circumstances, and the school could not subsidise them. The school was not even able to fund the organisation of structured workplace training places through the local Enterprise and Career Education Foundation provider:

> [SWL broker named] has a monopoly. You can't get an SWL [structured workplace learning] placement except through them. Kids can't pay and the school can't pay. Fundraising is not allowed by the principal and therefore nothing happens.

In this same school, the issue of Australian Quality Training Framework compliance in relation to accreditation of teachers for delivering VET internally and the unaffordable costs of delivering VET externally had combined to make the provision of a viable VET program virtually impossible. Unable to afford time release for its own teachers to be trained and accredited and unable to meet Australian Quality Training Framework compliance, it was also unable to afford to 'buy in' VET delivery from TAFE:

> AQTF [Australian Quality Training Framework] compliance doesn't understand school needs. Compliance runs on the financial year, yet courses run from February to December. We have students enrolled in courses for next year, yet our compliance registration runs out in July. This is really designed to push secondary schools out of VET. They are trying to push them into RTOs [registered training organisations] and TAFE, but is this too expensive for [us]. We are also too far away from a TAFE to get students there and we can't afford to bus them. [We are] more at risk of dropping out of VET than other schools—and [we] don't have much to begin with.

In contrast to this situation, a neighbouring state school was able to offer a broad VET program and was funding an industry liaison officer to find and coordinate work placements for students. In this case, the school had mode a decision to offer only those VET courses which it could provide as the registered training organsiation—a considerable range thanks to the school's size and its excellent facilities. Its dependence on TAFE was thereby reduced, as were any problems associated with funding externally sourced courses.

A similar story emerged in another state, where the luxury of 1100 students (and innovative timetabling) in one school made VET programs not only affordable but, in some cases, profitable:

> There is virtue in numbers. Without this you are at the mercy of TAFE. Unless you get a class
> of 15 you don't run a course. This number allows the school to buy in the resources it needs
> and offer the subjects to students at a 'mainstream cost'; that is, effectively no more than any
> other subject area. Students are not penalised by a VET focus; it is accessible. This would not
> be possible with lower numbers. Anything larger than 15, on the other hand, becomes a nice
> little earner and some larger subjects work to cross-subsidise new or emerging courses where
> numbers have not yet firmed up. Parents are very happy with this cost-neutrality policy and it
> makes for considerable continuity in planning …   (Principal)

Size also confers other strengths, including the ability to hire or use staff flexibly. One school had
the luxury of not having to depend on external providers to organise structured workplace learning
programs for its students. Rather it had funded an industry liaison officer for this purpose—a woman
with considerable experience in the local tourism and hospitality industry. In effect, her role had
become broader than this and she was the person to whom students now turned for advice regarding
TAFE courses, apprenticeships, traineeships and employment (rather than the guidance officer). This
position was funded by the school, a decision made possible by the school's size (2000 students) and
consequently greater flexibility in allocation of funds. The decision was also based on a recognition
of the need to employ an appropriately qualified person for a job requiring special expertise:

> Teachers cannot do industry liaison part time. Ring an employer and they ring you back
> when you're in class. If a teacher is going to do it, they need to be full time. You can't do
> guidance officer and industry liaison together. It is an advantage for someone [like me] who
> has industry experience and links to employers and the community.

Relationship with TAFE

We have seen already the dilemmas schools face in funding the provision of VET. Given the role
that TAFE institutes play in much of that provision, it is no surprise then that resource issues
dominate the relationship with TAFE. It is not, however, the only difficulty identified by schools in
their dealing with TAFE.

The cost issue was described succinctly by the VET coordinator in one Victorian school:

> Courses are presented on a user-pays basis. Costs are: $425 for office-admin, $400 for
> hospitality and $375 for sport-rec. These are major imposts, and it comes as no surprise that
> numbers are low—generally under 10 for VET when mainstream classes are usually in the
> order of 26.

While TAFE insists, with justification, on cost recovery, schools are differently placed in their
ability to pay for courses or to charge their students for these costs. The school quoted above has a
large student population, but a comparatively low level of commitment to VET. With little support
for VET and a questionable choice of programs on offer, it faces difficulties attracting sufficient
numbers of clients to offer VET economically.

In another setting, the relationship has taken on a sharp business edge. This can be seen in the
dealings between a large school wholly committed to VET programs and two neighbouring TAFE
institutes in the outer suburbs of a large capital city. Its relationship with the geographically nearer
of the two TAFE institutes, with which it has not been able to reach a satisfactory arrangement for
the delivery of courses, is virtually nil. Instead it enjoys a 'strong and mutually rewarding'
relationship with the other (geographically more distant) TAFE institute, with which it has been
able to negotiate on costs, methods of delivery and issues such as recognition of prior learning:

> With some TAFEs, it's very much a matter of having to take what they dish up: we won't
> stand for that. You need to have good skills in negotiating the best possible deal. Some schools
> don't have that relationship and express despair at the attitude of their local TAFE …
> Sometimes I feel I would love to get in there and negotiate on those schools' behalf …
>   (Principal)

The school approaches its negotiations with the TAFE sector with confidence and from a position of strength. The large numbers of students doing VET in the school make it an attractive client to a potential provider. The school has had no hesitation in 'shopping around' for the most attractive deal or package. In this school, a decision was taken to work with one TAFE provider to achieve volume and scale for optimum delivery and economies of scale. This allows the school to maintain a cost-neutral delivery, both from the students' and from the school's point of view.

Having noted this example, another large school with considerable 'buying power' described itself as being locked into a relationship with a single TAFE provider because its regional setting precluded any relationship being established with any other TAFE institutes. There is a strong sense in the school that the TAFE institute is exploiting its monopoly position and is unprepared to negotiate on details of cost or in flexibility of provision. In this particular case, the school has turned to a private provider for the delivery of some programs. In addition, it is expanding the range of programs it can deliver itself, to the extent that the school is auspicing VET programs in other schools, which have encountered similar problems with the one and only TAFE in the area.

Issues other than cost also influence the school–TAFE relationship. Perhaps the most important is TAFE's ability to deal with a school-age clientele. Schools want a TAFE which is 'committed to kids—that is important, that in the first instance they are committed not to me, or even to the school, but to the kids'. In many cases, schools have the view that TAFE does not understand the needs of students. Examples are given of TAFE teachers 'lecturing' for an hour, with no opportunities for questions, feedback or interaction. In another case, a practical work session of 3–6 hours followed by an assessment was cited as a case of a particularly unsuitable approach for school-aged students. Schools are also concerned about inflexible approaches to timetabling, which may cause problems both from a learning point of view and at the school organisational level:

> TAFE teachers don't understand the needs of kids. They make no accommodation for kids' learning styles, the point where they start from or, importantly, the 'duty of care' which a secondary school teacher undertakes as a given in framing the relationship with students. There is a tendency to organise program provision to suit the provider rather than the participant, for example, non-negotiability on timetabling, chunking big blocks of learning (3 or 6 hours straight, for example) and then testing for competency, rather than organising learning into more manageable units to meet students' needs.

Complaints are also made about the inaccessibility of TAFE staff, poor communication and inefficient systems of assessment or accreditation. In one case, it was claimed that the schools had not been given the costings for courses until after the school term had begun. There is evidence of TAFE institutes providing briefings for students interested in going on to tertiary VET, and schools are certainly willing to make available any literature which the TAFE distributes to them. However, there is no evidence of coordinated careers or guidance programs which involve both TAFE institutes and schools.

Again, the nature of any given TAFE–school relationship seems to depend heavily on the players involved. Schools with a stronger commitment to VET and some experience in dealing with the TAFE sector are better able to negotiate and maintain a relationship which is mutually beneficial to the two parties. TAFE institutes with some experience in dealing with schools seem better able and prepared to offer services sensitive to the needs of school-aged clients.

Summary

Many factors affect the ability of schools to offer good VET programs. Some are internal and involve physical and cultural resources. Others involve the relationship with the TAFE sector. In general, the following characteristics seemed to be associated with sites which were able to offer more comprehensive VET programs:

✧ high enrolments

✧ ability to offer courses on a cost-neutral basis or to charge students for courses

✧ proactive principal

✧ a view of VET as improving learning

✧ positive, modern view of VET

✧ proximity to a TAFE

✧ good relationship with TAFE.

What also emerges from the fieldwork in schools is a view of considerable change in attitudes to VET. Most teachers and school principals see a role for VET, even if, in some cases, it is only in the management of student diversity. Often, VET is credited with changing students' views of learning, motivating them and giving them the opportunity to enjoy the learning experience, with clear lifelong learning implications. Barriers to the implementation of VET seem more likely to be in the form of financial and institutional barriers, rather than teacher resistance. The following chapters examine the views of teachers and students more closely to investigate these changes in attitudes.

The TAFE view

This section draws on the data presented in the three reports commissioned from the TAFE research partners—Sydney Institute of TAFE, Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE and Kangan Batman Institute of TAFE—and is also informed by fieldwork carried out in these and three other TAFE institutes located in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. It presents a TAFE perspective on the relationship with schools and on the role of TAFE in dealing with school-aged students.

TAFE and early school leavers

The respondents in this study unanimously agreed that TAFE institutes had an important role to play in catering for the needs of early school leavers. In one large suburban TAFE, this role was portrayed as a public responsibility and a social justice issue. In another setting, TAFE was described as a safety net for this group. Another described itself as 'a public provider which provides second-chance opportunities for early school leavers'.

These assertions were backed by the argument that TAFE was a more appropriate environment than schools for some groups of early leavers. It was argued that this might be because the adult environment of the TAFE was better suited to some students or it might be because the training options in TAFE were better suited to the students' needs. There was a strongly expressed view that some schools 'don't have the style of teaching to deal with them. They alienate them'.

Supporting this view that TAFE has a role to play for early school leavers, all of the TAFE respondents were able to outline this role in the context of a strategic plan, and all gave evidence of strenuous efforts to develop relationships with local schools. 'VET in Schools coordinator' and 'schools-liaison officer' are titles of positions commonly found in TAFE now and, although the relationships with different schools may be somewhat uneven, a cross-sectoral view of the needs of young people seems to be slowly developing in TAFE institutes.

Accompanying this are strong arguments for TAFE to be fully funded (as schools are) to cater for this group. This was a recurring theme—one which proposed the view that, if TAFE were to be expected to deal with early leavers of school age, then it should be funded at the same level as schools for the same clientele.

However, despite this clear commitment to early school leavers generally, specific roles were defined somewhat differently at different sites and specific concerns were also raised. These may be categorised as follows:

✧ TAFE may not be appropriate for all early leavers, especially the very young ones (13- and 14-year-olds). TAFE institutes differ in the age groups and year levels they target or regard as appropriate clients.

✧ The range of programs available to TAFE institutes to cater for this group has narrowed in recent years. There are differences between institutes in perception of the adequacy of their offerings.

✧ TAFE staff do not necessarily have the experience to deal with this group, especially with those at the younger end of the age spectrum.

✧ TAFE is not adequately funded to deal with this group.

The first of these points was the most often raised. Reflecting a view common in schools, TAFE is happy to acknowledge that it is not an environment suitable for very young students. As adult learning facilities, TAFE institutes cannot always offer relevant pastoral care, appropriate levels of supervision of minors and a classroom environment designed for adolescents. All of these services for this specialist group, should they be provided, would involve considerable additional expense, since they do not form part of normal TAFE activities. Their provision is further complicated by the increasing levels of 'casualisation' among TAFE staff. Sessional lecturers cannot be expected to show the same commitment to student needs outside the classroom which full-time teachers in a school setting can.

Even for the 'older' early school leavers, 15- and 16 year-olds, the provision of adequate services and facilities was regarded as potentially difficult. Classrooms without 'youth friendly' displays and posters and in which noise or boisterous behaviour might be disruptive to neighbouring classes were mentioned as examples of such difficulties. Safety, 'duty of care' to minors and issues such as smoking were also raised. On a number of sites, this problem was addressed, at least partially, through the provision of special courses on separate campuses or in isolated sites on campus, thus allowing the development of an atmosphere better suited to younger clients.

With regard to the youngest early school leavers, a common view was that TAFE should not be dealing with this group at all. For many respondents, the perception was that 15 should be the minimum entry age to TAFE. It was not deemed appropriate for 13- and 14 year-olds to be attending TAFE providers. In particular, the placement of very young teenagers among adults and in classrooms designed for adults was regarded as a potential problem.

However, some exceptions to this view should be noted. In one urban TAFE institute, a youth program for these very young school leavers has been established to deal with particularly difficult cases. However, in order to avoid any perception of it as an easy alternative to school, this program is not actively promoted either in the schools, in the TAFE institute, or in the community. Officially, the message from the TAFE institute to students is couched in terms like: 'The best thing is to stay at school'. Students are only referred when it is clear that they cannot cope, in academic or social terms, in a school environment.

In another TAFE institute, a youth centre caters for a similarly young clientele. Many are referred by schools. Some have been expelled or are ex-offenders who 'just turn up' and ask to enrol in a course. In this particular TAFE institute, however, the 'aim is to get them back into school'. The institute is all too aware that it is not the ideal setting for such a young clientele and views its role as supporting or complementing the school system, rather than replacing it. The approach here is to 'embed TAFE delivery within the community' and to see TAFE's role as part of a broader strategy to deal with the needs of young people.

There are, evidently, inconsistencies inherent in the TAFE view of early school leavers—inconsistencies which TAFE itself acknowledges. TAFE sees the inadequacies of the school system in catering for this group and outlines a case for the important role it can play in dealing with these students—a case also predicated upon its own commitment to social justice and equity. At the same time, it acknowledges the challenges of dealing with this clientele and its own shortcomings in the area. Differentially placed to address these shortcomings, individual TAFE institutes are taking a range of positions with regard to early school leavers. For some, very young school leavers are excluded from their target clientele. For others, this is a group which must be included if schools have failed to cater for it.

The second reservation regarding early leavers related to the provision of appropriate programs, and again there are differences in the approaches taken by individual TAFE institutes. As one TAFE manager puts it, the problem is clear but the solution less so:

> What you're essentially dealing with is the concept of bridging … from what their current knowledge is to some level where they're capable of doing some sort of vocational course to get skills and get a job. I've never been totally satisfied with the products we offer in this area …

Literacy and numeracy issues were paramount in the discussion of appropriate courses for these students. The Certificate in General Education for Adults (CGEA) Level 1 was regarded as particularly strong in this respect, with its emphasis on literacy and numeracy modules. However, the point was also made that some students do not necessarily need such programs, but rather need to be steered either into a 'taster' vocational course which makes them aware of the range of VET options which are available, or into a specific vocational area at a very basic level (pre-certificate I).

A number of respondents made the point that pre-vocational courses, of the kind commonly offered in TAFE in the past, have now been largely abandoned. In the context of the Australian Qualifications Framework, such courses involved competencies below the level of certificate I and therefore could no longer be accommodated, despite a continuing need for them:

> And that's the dilemma: we have to offer accredited training and we can only go with what's around. So it's kind of like there's still a gap at that lower level.

An exception was highlighted in New South Wales, where the pre-vocational course in printing was described as a useful opportunity for young people who leave school very early (that is, in Year 10).

An alternative to accredited VET courses and the senior school certificate was also proposed. This involved the formation of partnerships between TAFE and schools to collaboratively assess the needs of these students and to provide parallel negotiated services. The increasing number of TAFE institutes providing a dedicated liaison person to work with schools is evidence that such collaborations may become possible in the future. Taking this concept one step further, one TAFE institute's initiative to develop a TAFE-based senior college (Years 11 and 12) was also suggested as a means of developing an appropriate learning environment for this clientele of young people.

The third concern raised by staff was the provision of adequate training to deal with these younger students. One respondent highlighted the inexperience of TAFE teachers in dealing with younger clients (a point also made by some school staff). Another made the point that most TAFE lecturers are not trained to teach, in the sense that primary school teachers are.

Finally, it was argued that TAFE is not funded adequately to deal with this new clientele, either in terms of offering adequate facilities and services, in developing appropriate courses, or in training staff to deal with younger students. From the TAFE's perspective, the younger clients are much more resource-intensive than adults and most enrol in full courses rather than individual modules. There was a perception that the funding of school-aged students in TAFE must reflect the levels at which they are funded in schools.

TAFE and VET in Schools provision

TAFE staff are willing, in principle, to endorse the concept of schools delivering VET. The value of schools providing young people with an introduction to vocational training is not disputed and VET in Schools programs are seen as effective in providing a 'taster' of the options available in training. However, with the possible exceptions of information technology and office administration courses, schools are not judged to be capable of delivering accredited vocational training.

Concerns with the quality of what schools do in the VET area are consistently expressed in TAFE. Chief among these concerns is the ability of teachers to deliver vocational competencies. The following comments are illustrative:

> What they've created now is a hybrid system where they are pretending that high school teachers with a general education and who have lived in high schools all their life, are capable of delivering vocational competencies after completing a few hours of some course related to 'train the trainer' or the certificate IV with a 'top-up' from a degree to a Certificate IV of Workplace Assessment and Training …

These concerns extend to facilities in schools, including the occupational health and safety conditions in school workshops, and the issue of access. Whether VET was becoming the prerogative of only the more able students and whether schools were the appropriate venue for teaching skills relating to the adult world of work were two of the concerns raised relating to access.

TAFE staff were particularly concerned that the accreditation of poor-quality training in schools would mean students which enter TAFE without the competencies implied by their school-delivered qualifications. A view was also proposed that such poor-quality training would have a negative impact on the way industry viewed VET qualifications:

> And the problem for us is that their [school teachers'] misinterpretation of the standards within competencies produces for us a whole range of training that we have to recognise but we know is largely second-rate. Industry knows it's second-rate, every TAFE institution in the country knows it's second-rate. The only people who don't know it's second-rate are the high schools and apparently our political masters. Now eventually you know what's going to hit the fan, and industry's going to be up in arms about the watering down of the standards of training in their industry training areas.

The alternative to school delivery of VET courses is, of course, TAFE delivery, but this creates its own problems and is perhaps the greatest single source of friction between TAFE institutes and schools. One of the strongest incentives for schools to persist with school-level delivery would, indeed, seem to be the administrative and financial problems created by the 'purchase' of delivery from TAFE, whether this involves students attending a course at a TAFE institute or bringing TAFE staff into schools.

The school perspective, well documented in the last chapter, is that the purchase of TAFE delivery involves considerable expense to the school or to the student, expense which is not fully covered by the school's operating grant. The TAFE perspective is no less reasonable. TAFE institutes are required to recover their costs. With the exception of special taster courses funded by some states in order to market VET courses to school students, TAFE institutes are not funded to deliver training to these students. Schools, unused to the 'commercial and contractual realities' of VET, are consequently critical of TAFE's businesslike attitude to recovering its costs. There is also a perception, in both sectors, that there is competition for the limited resources associated with student enrolments.

One TAFE institute noted that schools are reluctant to allow their students to enrol in TAFE courses while at school because of the threat this poses to their funding and staffing entitlements. Moreover, Board of Studies regulations in some states which prevent students from enrolling in VET before Year 11 place a further barrier between schools and the VET sector. Any VET courses completed by these younger students while at school cannot be counted towards fulfilment of the senior certificate and this presents a strong disincentive to enrol in VET for students who may stand to benefit greatly from VET courses in Year 10.

In the context of the concerns raised here, it is no surprise that TAFE institutes are reluctant to endorse the view that VET in Schools is meeting the needs of young people. There is a view that schools do not fully cater for the needs of their clientele, either in their general courses which do not meet the needs of the weaker students, or in their VET delivery which is perceived as being poor in quality and as increasingly less accessible to the academically weaker students. Schools need to 'employ people similar to the way TAFE does', with the emphasis on relevant and recent industry experience. There is also a view that needless and inefficient duplication of resources is occurring, with schools trying (ineffectively) to imitate what TAFE is already doing:

> Jones High School is a small inner city school located within 15 minutes walking distance of [our] institute. The school recently submitted an application for a grant of $400 000 to develop a VET Centre with new facilities being developed in IT [information technology], business, tourism and hospitality, and retail. At the same time, [our] institute has embarked on a $48 million building construction and refurbishment program that includes these

vocational areas. Suggestions that the same set of facilities be used for both VET in Schools and mainstream TAFE students are not accepted.

In reality, a process of accommodation seems to be occurring. While the nature and level of school-based resources will, to a large extent, determine what any individual school can offer in the way of VET programs, a broader pattern seems to be emerging. This is a pattern in which a narrow range of industry areas are becoming the 'domain' of school-based providers while TAFE is increasingly relied upon to deliver the remainder:

> A model seems to be emerging where secondary schools have the human and physical resources to deliver business, information technology, and tourism and hospitality programs, but rely on TAFE institutes to deliver programs that are more resource intensive.
>
> (TAFE respondent)

TAFE and school completers

If the role TAFE plays for school students is fraught with difficulties, then its role vis-à-vis school completers may be described as fraught with uncertainties.

While TAFE continues to make efforts to market its courses to school completers, students continue to make university their first choice. Where students are able to apply for their course through a university admissions committee (as in Victoria or New South Wales), many students reject their offer of a place in TAFE. Careers teachers continue to talk about TAFE as a second-chance option and promote it as a fall-back position, should a student's attempts to get into university fail.

TAFE expends considerable effort marketing its courses to school completers, but acknowledges that school students largely ignore their promotional material. TAFE wants school students (and their teachers, careers counsellors and parents) to take TAFE as post-schooling option more seriously, but where entry through a university admissions committee is possible (as in Victoria), concludes that this is not a good way for students to apply for entry. The argument here is that TAFE courses, lined up against the university offerings, will always be placed lower on a list of preferences. As the role of TAFE is changing, from a traditional provider of trade courses to a diverse provider of training ranging from basic literacy to technician-level diplomas, so too it seems that there is a need for public perceptions of TAFE to change.

Our TAFE respondents, however, also acknowledge the change which has occurred in schools as a result of changing clienteles and the development of VET in Schools programs. While some schools are perceived as stubbornly conservative and reluctant to provide students with advice about TAFE, there is also acknowledgment of positive developments: 'There is still a perception that TAFE is a 'second choice' option but this is not as strong as it was, say, five years ago'. Another TAFE cites the rapid growth in the numbers of VET in Schools students enrolled there as evidence of a fundamental change in attitudes to VET:

> The status of TAFE is certainly improving which is clearly evident through the increased offering of TAFE programs through VET in Schools. Since the inception of VET in Schools at [our] TAFE in 1996, the number of VET students has jumped from 40 in 1996 to 3128 currently in 2001.

Summary

The views of TAFE staff regarding the main aspects of the relationship with schools and with a school-aged clientele may be summarised as follows.

TAFE and early leavers

✧ TAFE institutes differ in the roles they play for early leavers. Very young early leavers (13- and 14 year-olds) are not regarded as suited to most TAFE environments.

✧ There is a perception that the range of programs available from institutes for early leavers has narrowed in recent years.

✧ TAFE staff question whether they have the experience and resources to deal adequately with the needs of this group.

TAFE and VET in Schools

✧ TAFE questions the quality of much of the training offered in VET in Schools courses. The lack of adequately trained and experienced staff is seen as a major problem.

✧ There is a perception that TAFE and schools are carving out niches in the training market, whereby schools provide the kinds of courses their facilities and staff profile will allow, while TAFE provides training which schools cannot offer from within their own resources.

✧ Better cooperation between the VET sector and the schools sector is needed to avoid wasteful duplication of resources.

TAFE and school completers

✧ There seems to be a greater acceptance in schools of TAFE as a legitimate post-schooling option, although resistance in some schools continues.

✧ There is a perception that many school leavers continue to reject places offered in TAFE courses.

✧ Application for a TAFE place through a tertiary admissions committee does not suit all TAFE applicants.

The data presented here support the view elaborated in the previous chapter that there has been some cultural change in schools. The TAFE staff acknowledge this and, although there are still concerns about how schools view TAFE, it is financial and institutional barriers which seem to have emerged as the main sources of tension between schools and TAFE.

These tensions require further investigation from the student's point of view. Ultimately, it is the student, whether located in a school or in a TAFE, who must be the focus of policy. It is the student as client whose best interests must be determined in the provision of accessible and suitable options, whether these be located in one sector or the other (or in both). The following chapters seek to provide this client perspective through an investigation of student needs, attitudes and aspirations and by means of an analysis of their post-schooling destinations.

The teacher view

This chapter is based on teacher survey data collected as part of a survey of teachers conducted in September–October 2002. It presents data aggregated across the schools and also data broken down by category of teacher (VET teachers/non-VET teachers) and data broken down by category of school (strong VET/limited VET). The rationale for the latter measure is outlined in the methodology section. This chapter is based on data provided by 376 teachers from 10 of the 12 research schools.

How teachers see the role of VET in Schools

A previous chapter in this report, presenting the views of school staff on VET, identified the management of diversity and the improvement of learning as two of the principal potential benefits of VET in Schools. These views are strongly confirmed by the survey data. The teachers acknowledged the importance of VET in dealing with the diverse clienteles they teach (see figure 1). Virtually the entire sample of teachers who were surveyed agreed that students struggling with the mainstream curriculum and those intending to leave school early need VET programs. Similarly high proportions of teachers saw the value of VET for students who are interested in technology or business, *regardless of their ability*, and for students who are only average academically.

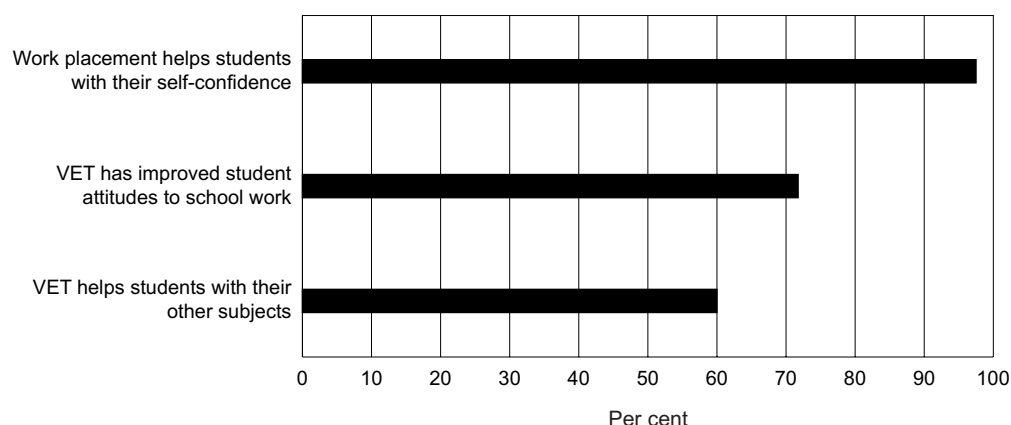**Figure 1:   Teachers' views of role of VET in Schools**
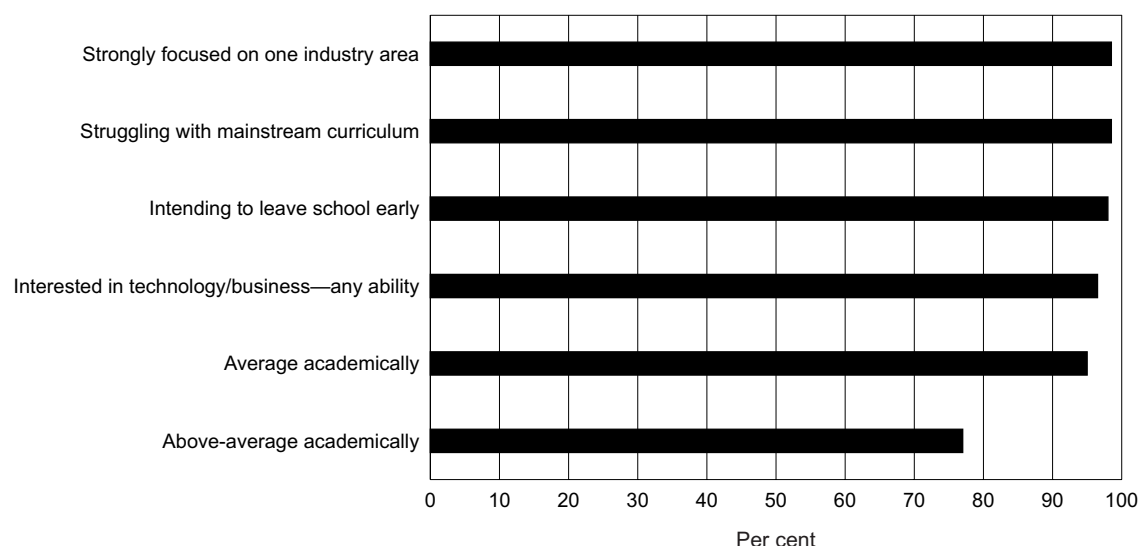
It is particularly noteworthy that, in this sample of teachers, most of whom are not involved in VET, over three-quarters felt that vocational education and training is important even for those students who are above average academically.

An examination of teachers' views of the role of VET in Schools in improving learning yields somewhat more mixed results (see figure 2). Certainly, the work placement component was viewed very positively. Most teachers were willing to endorse the view that work placement increases the self-confidence of students. Furthermore, over seven in ten teachers believed that VET has improved students' attitudes to their school work. These morale-related effects of VET are important in the context of the literature on disaffection and alienation from schooling.

Teachers' views of the direct benefits of VET with regard to other subjects were not so unequivocal. However, even on this measure, six in ten teachers were willing to endorse the view that VET helps students with their other subjects.

**Figure 2:   Teachers' views of VET in Schools**

These predominantly positive views of the role of VET were not confined to the VET in Schools program only. Teachers appeared to be remarkably open to the importance of giving students information about non-university options and to creating links with TAFE and the world of work (see figure 3). All items in this figure attracted nearly 100% teacher' support as important or very important. In fact, teachers were more likely to describe as 'very important' the provision of information regarding employment, apprenticeships and VET than the provision of advice regarding university applications. And TAFE advice and university advice rated equally in teachers' views of their relative importance. However, it must be pointed out that there was a difference between the level of 'very high' endorsement given to items relating to advice and those relating to establishing links. This would seem to indicate that teachers are more comfortable with their role as providers of information than with their role in brokering or liaising with parties outside the school. This may be due to the more time- and resource-intensive nature of such tasks and is certainly indicative of the additional requirements placed on teachers working in the field of VET.

Figure 3: Teachers' views of careers advice
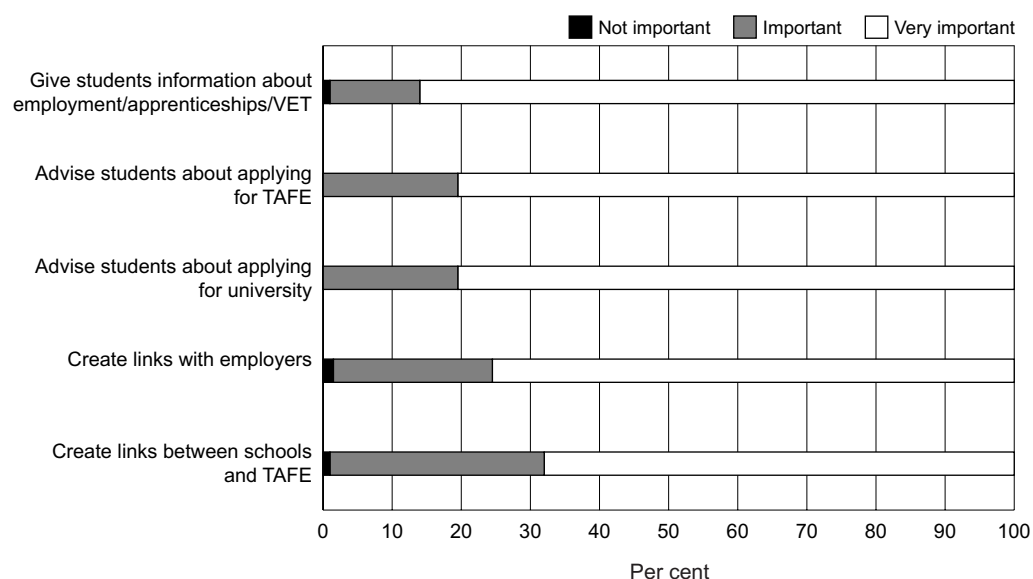
What is remarkable about these findings is the overall high level of endorsement of VET evident in teachers' views. Having said this, there were some differences in emphasis between VET teachers and 'mainstream' teachers, although these were more a matter of degree rather than substantially different opinions. Figure 4 illustrates where these differences in emphasis occur. When asked to comment on the importance of providing VET for different student groups, VET and non-VET teachers differed significantly only in their views of the appropriateness of VET for above-average students. But there were also some differences in the level of importance attached to VET for other groups.

**Figure 4: Teachers' views of the importance of VET for different groups**
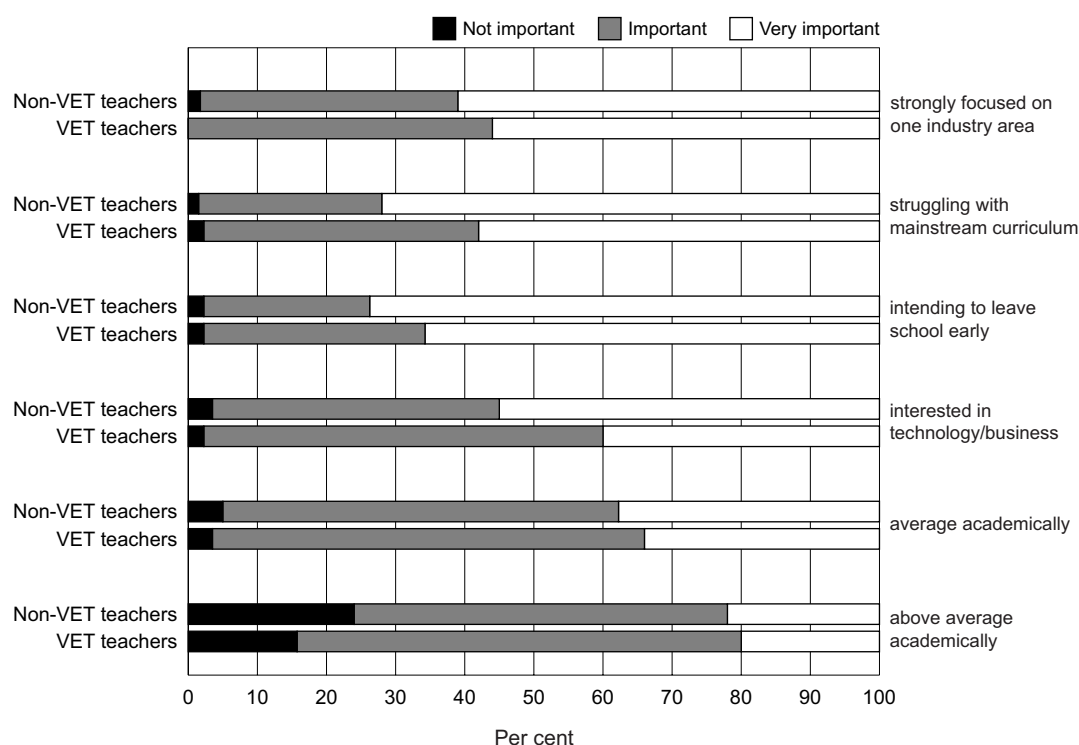
For example, it was the non-VET teachers who were most likely to view VET as 'very important' for students struggling with the mainstream curriculum, for students intending to leave school early and for students interested in technology or business or interested in a particular industry area. They were more likely to endorse VET even for students who are average academically. On the other hand, non-VET teachers were the group least likely to see VET as 'very important' for above-average students, and nearly one-quarter of these teachers described it as 'not important' (compared with only 16% of VET teachers).

What this figure seems to illustrate is a greater likelihood on the part of these non-VET teachers to see VET as a tool for managing students who are academically weaker or who are inclined to non-academic pathways. For such students, they are even stronger advocates of VET in Schools than are the VET teachers themselves. However, while most will acknowledge the importance of VET for above-average students, they are less likely to do so than VET teachers. This seems to indicate some residual resistance among teachers to VET as an important option for *all* students, regardless of the students' ability.

Supporting this argument are the data on teachers' views of when students should begin their VET studies. Non-VET teachers were most likely to advocate that students begin their VET studies in Year 10 or even earlier, and while this view also attracted support from some VET teachers, the VET teachers were much more likely than their non-VET colleagues to argue for VET to be restricted to the senior certificate years (see figure 5).

Figure 5:   Teachers' views of when students should begin VET in Schools
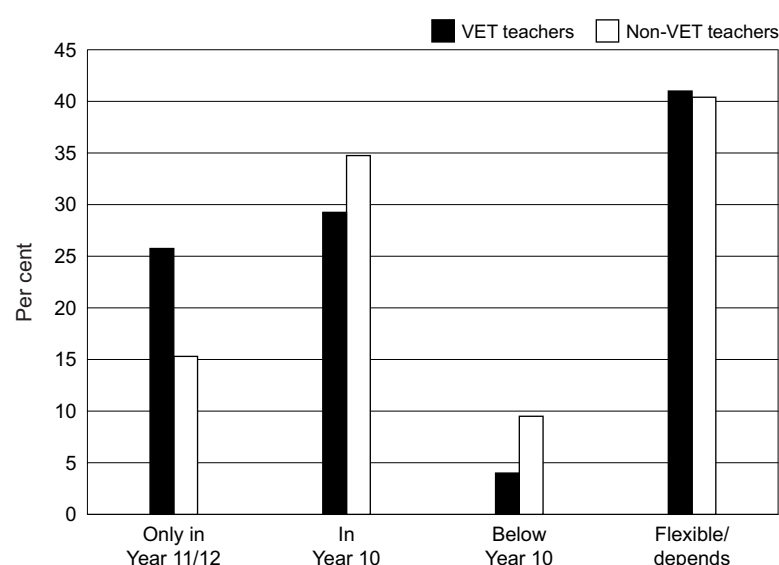
The debate over the balance between general and vocational education in schools is a long-standing one (see, for example Blunden 1996; Hickox 1995; Edwards, Sewirtz & Willey 1992). The need to avoid channelling students into vocational options which preclude access to university and which deny facilitated access between general and vocational programs has also been raised on various occasions (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 1996; Sweet 2000; Polesel 2001). The views of the mainstream teachers presented above must be considered in the context of these debates. It is evident that some mainstream teachers would support an argument that VET should be a substitute for mainstream programs, even at year levels where the curriculum is not usually differentiated (that is, Year 10 and below). It is possible that this reflects a view that management of diversity is best addressed by a form of 'streaming', channelling those students not oriented to the academic curriculum into alternative (vocational) pathways.

However, if such an approach were to lead to a narrowing of the pathways open to such students, or if it were to substitute narrowly vocational competencies for the broad range of general

competencies required by all young people, then it is possible that VET in Schools would be creating as many problems as it solves. Certainly, these VET in Schools teachers seemed to understand this in their greater reluctance to endorse vocational studies for students in the younger age brackets.

Nevertheless, it is also important not to stereotype the mainstream teachers as narrowly concerned with partitioning off the non-academic students into vocational pathways from an early age. Both groups of teachers acknowledged the diversity of their clienteles and both groups of teachers argued that the level at which VET is introduced should be flexible and dependent on the student's needs (over four in ten teachers in each category have chosen this option). And even among the VET teachers, there was some support for introducing VET to younger age groups. What is crucial is the nature of that support, the pathways it creates (or closes), its relationship to the program of general studies—does it rule out a pathway to university studies?—and the qualifications framework (both senior certificate and VET accreditation) within which it occurs.

How teachers see the effectiveness of VET

On the whole, school teachers were very positive in their views of the effectiveness of what schools do. Ranging from their schools' provision of a broad, inclusive curriculum to the operation of an effective discipline policy, teachers reported high levels of agreement (see figure 6). Notably, however, the two items with the lowest levels of support both related to the school's management of diverse learning needs.

Figure 6:   Teachers' views of the efficacy of their schools
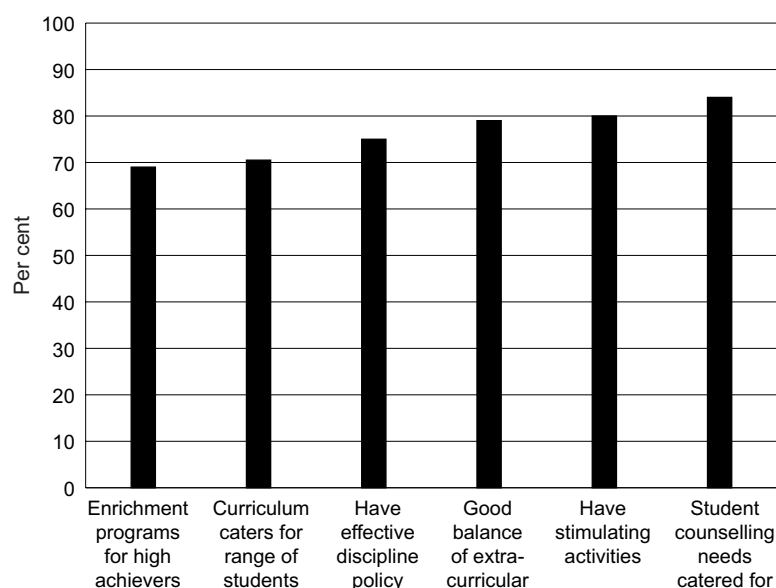
In this context, the current study is particularly interested in how the operation of a strong VET in Schools program affects a school's ability to provide a broad and inclusive curriculum. For this reason, a comparison of schools, based on their level of commitment to VET, is presented below. The methodology adopted for this study resulted in the selection of matched pairs of schools in most of the communities studied. The aim was to include in most locations a school with demonstrated strong commitment to VET and one with a more limited VET program. The process, described in the methodology, resulted in seven schools being assigned to the 'strong VET' category and five to the 'limited VET' category.

Using these categories, figure 7 examined teachers' views of their schools broken down by the kind of school they work in. These data seem to show that the 'strong VET' schools were better able than the 'limited VET' schools to manage diversity—on measures of curriculum range, programs for high achievers and stimulating activities. However, on the other measures—discipline policy, extra-curricular activities and student counselling—they were perceived as less successful than the 'limited VET' schools, although these findings may also be related to the nature of the clientele in the latter group of schools.

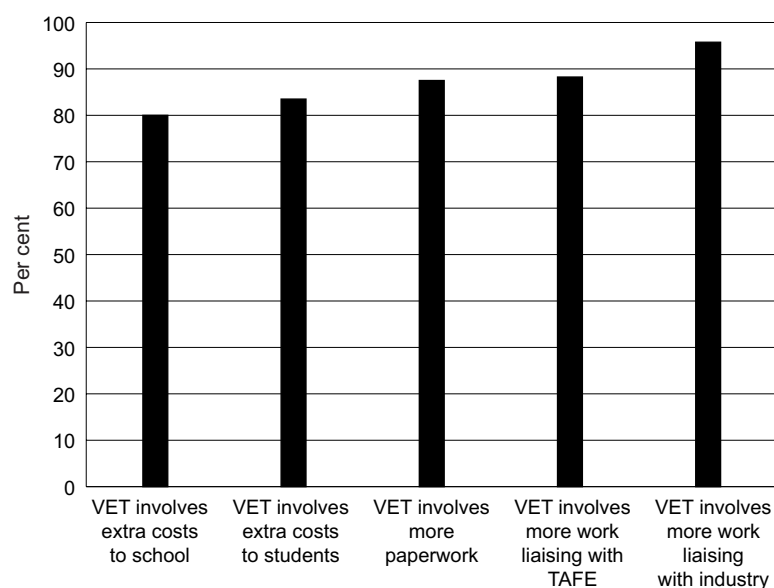**Figure 7:   Teachers' views of school**
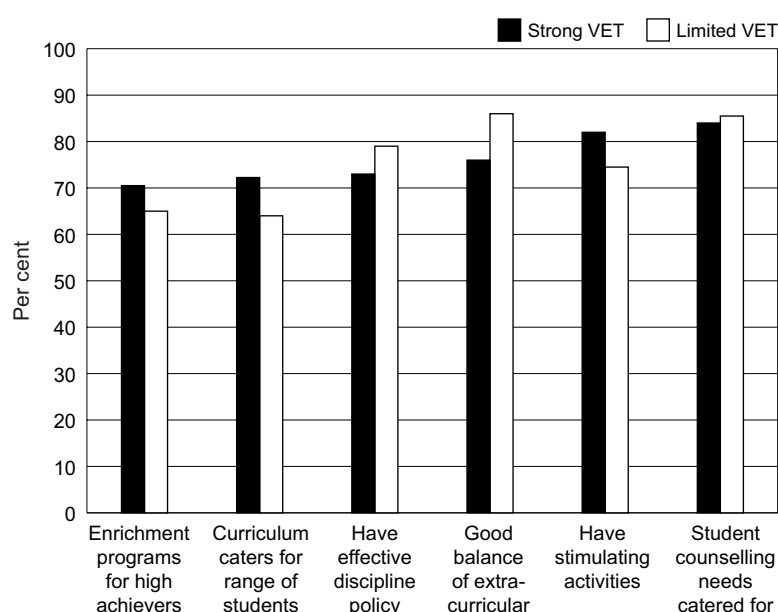
How teachers see the resourcing of VET in Schools

The costs to schools of providing vocational education and training extend beyond the obvious monetary costs evident in fees charged by TAFE or costs levied on students, although these also are acknowledged by teachers. In any analysis of the cost of VET, the time commitments attached to teaching VET and the issue of training teachers and providing adequate infrastructure in the school must also be considered.

It is evident from the preceding chapters that these issues will affect different schools in different ways. For example, schools with adequate facilities and trained staff have some advantages. Others with the size and purchasing power to access TAFE programs are better able to 'buy in' programs for their students at lower cost. Nevertheless, the data reported in figure 8 indicate that the majority of VET teachers saw all of these as significant issues. In particular, the issues associated with the extra work generated by being a VET teacher (liaising with employers, liaising with TAFE and completing paperwork) were the ones most likely to be nominated by teachers working in this field. These findings support the view that teaching VET carries responsibilities and time commitments additional to the normal load placed on teachers working in mainstream subjects. It also requires skills—dealing with industry and dealing with other VET providers—which have not been part of a secondary teacher's normal duties in the past.

Figure 8:   Teachers' views of the costs of VET

These findings were supported by teachers' views of the potential barriers to the growth of VET in Schools programs. Many of the issues raised in the preceding chapters were also nominated here by teachers as potential barriers. These included internal barriers, such as the level of the principal's commitment, the academic values of teachers and timetabling constraints (see figure 9). They also included factors external to the school, such as parents' aspirations to send their children to university, the students' own views of VET and the difficulties in forging links with TAFE institutes and other VET providers.

Figure 9:   Teachers' views of barriers to VET in Schools
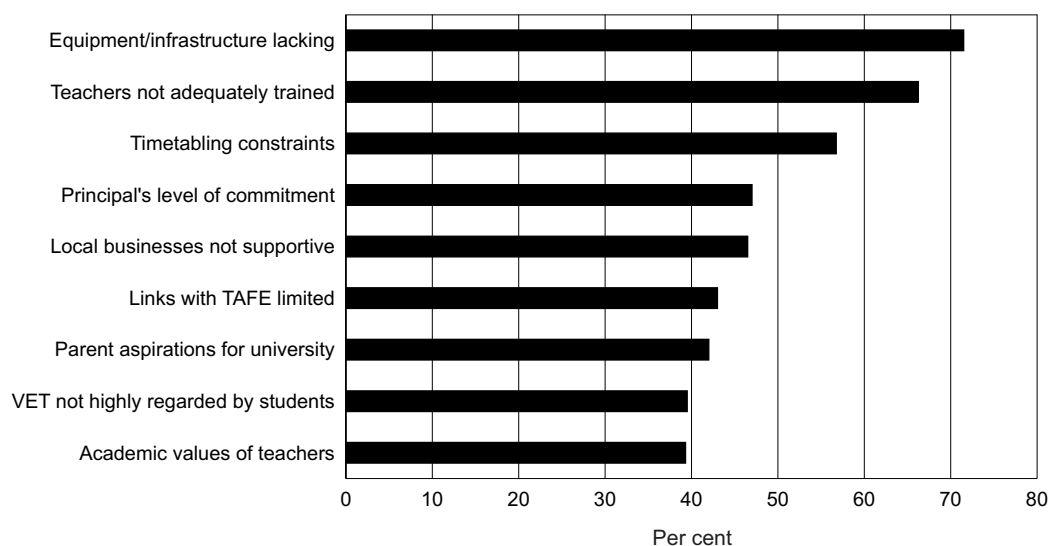
However, the two items which generated the highest level of support were those associated with resourcing issues—the training of teachers to work in the VET field and the provision of adequate facilities and equipment. It is evident that teachers were concerned with the lack of leadership in some school settings and with the conservatism and resistance to VET shown by some of their colleagues. Similarly, teachers understood that the students' own conservatism, often supplemented by that of their parents, would represent significant barriers to the growth of VET in Schools programs. Yet, interestingly, it is not these 'cultural' barriers which teachers identified as the most

important blockers to growth. Rather, it was the provision of adequate resources and the need for teachers to be trained to be effective providers of VET programs which were most commonly identified as potential barriers to the growth of VET.

Summary

The views expressed by teachers in relation to the role, the effectiveness and the resourcing of VET in Schools, as identified in the survey, may be summarised as follows:

How teachers see the role of VET in schools

✧ Both VET and non-VET teachers consider VET programs to be an invaluable learning experience for many students, including those interested in technology and business or who are academically average, but particularly those students intending to leave school early, or who are struggling with mainstream education.

✧ Teachers recognise the potential benefit of VET work placements to considerably increase and enhance students' self-confidence.

✧ Providing information to students about non-university options, including employment, apprenticeships and TAFE, is viewed as important as the provision of advice about university courses. However, teachers are slightly less likely to strongly endorse the role of creating links with TAFE and with employers.

✧ VET and non-VET teachers differ in their opinions of which groups should be accommodated by VET programs. Non-VET teachers appear more inclined to recommend VET programs for students in Year 10 or below, and who are average academically, whereas VET teachers strongly support the introduction of VET only in Years 11 and 12 and advocate VET programs for students of all skill levels, including students who are above average academically.

How teachers see the effectiveness of VET

✧ Schools with strong VET programs are perceived to be better able than those with limited VET programs to manage diversity in the way of a varied curriculum, the availability of programs for high achievers and stimulating activities.

✧ Schools with strong VET programs are perceived to be less successful than schools with limited VET programs in delivering adequate discipline policies, extra-curricular activities and student counselling.

How teachers see the resourcing of VET in schools

✧ VET teachers have a greater workload and responsibility (in addition to their role as mainstream teachers) generated by liaising with employers, TAFE and other VET providers and completing associated paperwork.

✧ There is a shortage of suitably trained teachers to effectively deliver VET programs in schools.

✧ Schools lack the adequate infrastructure and resources necessary to be able to deliver and expand VET programs.

✧ Internal pressures preventing the promotion and growth of VET in Schools include lack of support and commitment from principals, the perceived academic worth of VET teachers and timetabling constraints.

✧ External factors limiting the promotion and growth of VET in Schools include parental influence on the career path and educational choices of their child, student perception of VET programs and links with TAFE institutions and other VET providers.

While teacher sentiment is generally very positive towards the role and effectiveness of VET programs in delivering positive educational outcomes for secondary students, there still remain a number of key issues which will significantly influence the availability and accessibility of VET programs to young people in the future. These appear to be tied in to the financial and structural constraints associated with the operation of high schools and which make the broader mission of delivering VET both complex and time-consuming.
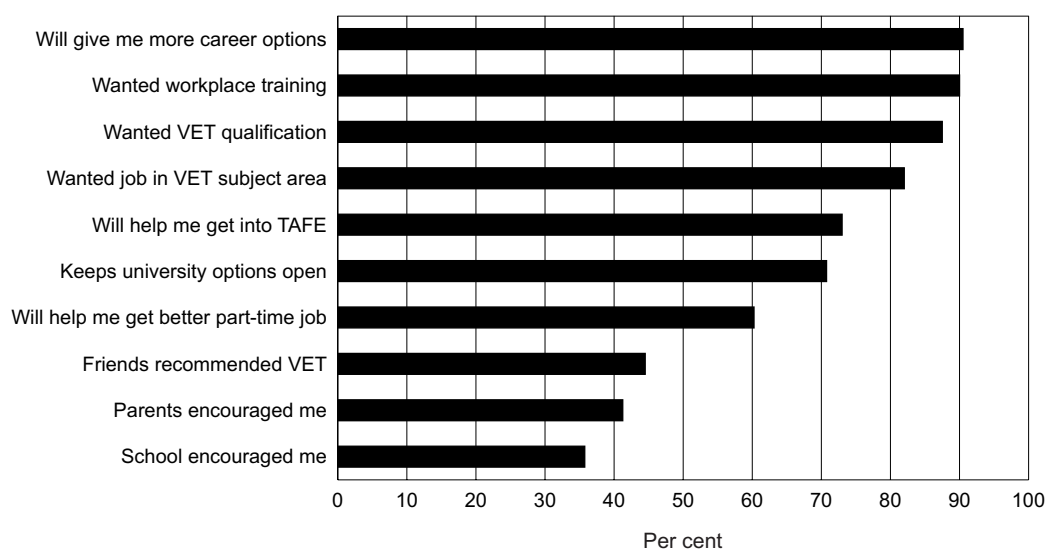
The student view

This chapter is based on 1180 student survey responses collected as part of the classroom-based survey of the current Year 11 students in the 11 survey schools which provided data. This survey was conducted in September–October 2002. It examines students' views of VET, of structured workplace training and of work experience. It also examines students' perceptions of the barriers to participation in VET. As previously stated, these students attend a range of metropolitan and non-metropolitan schools in three states and in the government and non-government sectors. While not strictly representative of the views of all Year 11 students across Australia, their perceptions give us insights into the concerns of senior secondary students regarding VET and the barriers to participating in VET programs in a range of typical school settings.

Views of VET in Schools

The survey data tell us a great deal about the reasons these students give for enrolling in VET in Schools programs. Most important among these reasons are the widening of career options, the opportunity to get workplace training and the desire to gain a VET qualification (see figure 10).

Figure 10:   Students' reasons for enrolling in VET in Schools

The first of these reasons, chosen by nine in ten respondents, reflects the students' need for flexibility and choice. For many young people, career choices are fluid at this age and VET presents itself as a useful additional or alternative pathway which provides both training for a particular job and a widening of the choices available.

The second reason, also nominated by about nine in ten respondents, reflects the concern many young people have about obtaining useful experience and skills, so that they can access jobs. With the range of job opportunities available to young people largely confined to low-skilled, poorly paid jobs (often located in the retail sector), the need for broader experience in a range of sectors is

crucial. Structured workplace training provides these broader opportunities and creates links with employers which may be beneficial to school leavers seeking employment in the future.

Also of great importance in the eyes of this group of students is the qualification itself. For most early school leavers a VET qualification is their only qualification upon leaving school and therefore their only currency in the labour market. Even for those who obtain their senior certificate, it might be argued that they would regard a specific vocational qualification as being of equal or greater value than that embodied in a generic and general school qualification. There is also some evidence that employers would take a similar view (Polesel et al. 1999). It might also be argued that an entry-level qualification such as that obtained in a school environment provides young people with some motivation and confidence to continue in or re-enter the world of education and training at a later date. While much has been written about the supposed devaluation of qualifications in the labour market, it is revealing that young people themselves value qualifications very highly.

The range of reasons for enrolling in VET discussed above would support a view that VET is seen as providing flexibility and options. However, we also find that over 80% of these students were doing their VET program in order to get a particular job in the VET subject area they were studying. Clearly, working towards a specific job goal and keeping alternative pathways open are not mutually exclusive objectives.

Other reasons also emerged as important. Over seven in ten students chose VET because it improves their chances of getting into TAFE or because it keeps their options of going to university open. The theme of flexible pathways emerges again here. Vocational training, by definition, prepares these students for work, but it also keeps other options open, including the pathway into university. The integration of VET into the senior curriculum has meant that choosing a VET option no longer severs the link to the academic, university-oriented curriculum. These data would indicate that students are well aware of this.

Also of importance to six in ten respondents was the usefulness of VET in providing access to better part-time work than that without training. This may reflect the growing importance of part-time work to students in the senior years of secondary schooling and in university.

Gender differences in the reasons students give for enrolling in VET were also explored and, for the most part, no statistically significant differences were found between male and female respondents. The one item in which a difference emerged was the reason relating to parents' encouragement. Male students were more likely than female students to report that their parents' encouragement was a reason for enrolling in VET. This may be an indication that parents' conservatism about the role of VET may be more entrenched in the context of their daughters than of their sons.

How these students actually regard their VET programs provides some evidence that their motivations for doing VET, as expressed in the discussion above, are justified. Certainly their strong need for workplace experience seems to have been largely satisfied (see figure 11). Nine in ten respondents reported that they were learning the skills they need for work. Over eight in ten (84.5%) believed that their VET program had helped them understand their industry area and a similar proportion (83.6%) reported that what they learned in class helped them understand the tasks they would do in their job. Similarly, over seven in ten respondents reported that their work placement had helped increase their self-confidence, echoing teachers' views of the role of work placement.

Lower proportions of respondents believed that VET had improved their attitude to their school work (six in ten) or helped them with their other subjects (five in ten), although these numbers suggest that VET is successful for some students at least in improving their approach to learning more generally. For somewhat fewer than half the students, their VET studies could have provided more practical content, although this finding must be seen in the context of predominantly positive views overall of their VET programs.

Figure 11: Students' views of VET in Schools programs
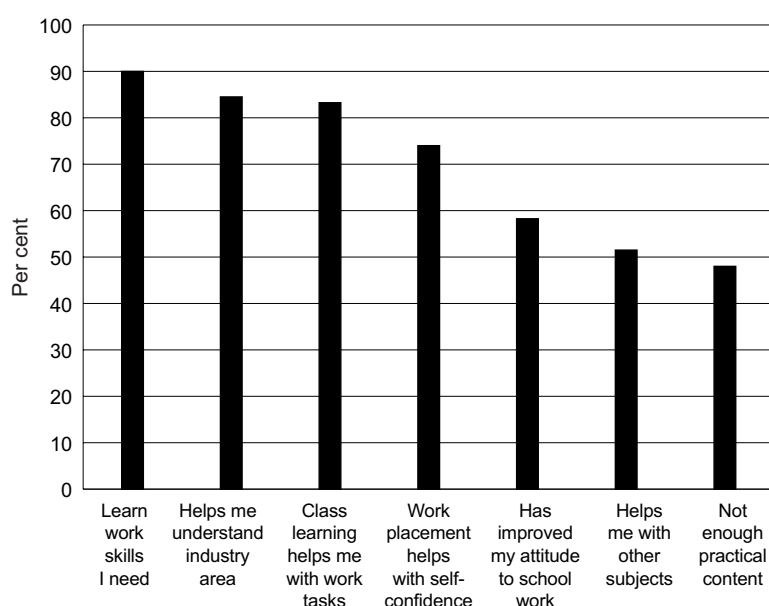
Views of work experience and workplace training

Our survey showed that approximately six in ten of the students had completed work experience at the time of surveying. Of this group, a minority reported a predominantly positive view of the experience. For most (45.2%), there was a view that they 'learnt a few things, but it was mostly routine'. For a further 10.8%, the experience was mainly negative—'It was boring. I didn't learn much. Just a job'. The mainly positive option provided on the menu of choices ('It was challenging and interesting most of the time') was chosen by just over four in ten respondents (44.0%).

Of those students in VET in Schools programs, approximately three-quarters (75.3%) indicated that they had participated in a work placement already or that they expected to do so in the future.

Views of work placement (structured workplace learning) were, however, more sanguine (see figure 12). Among those who indicated that they had already taken part (36% of VET in Schools students), a menu of items designed to elicit views of the placement provided mainly positive images.

Students saw their work placement as providing benefits which their school cannot. Nearly nine in ten reported that they were learning things which they cannot learn at school. Over eight in ten believed that their work placement encourages good habits, and over seven in ten saw it as providing an opportunity to move into a good job in the future. A similar proportion regarded it as more enjoyable than school, and a majority of students would recommend it to their friends. Negative images ('not as important as school' and 'a place where nobody did much') attracted low levels of support. Despite these very positive views, most students, however, stopped short of claiming that their work placement is a situation in which they learn 'more' than at school.

Comparing the responses of this group of students with those regarding work experience highlights the fact that students see work placement in a more positive way than they do work experience. For the majority (52.0%), a predominantly positive view prevailed ('It was challenging and interesting most of the time'). For a further 38.2%, there was a view that they 'learnt a few things, but it was mostly routine'. For 9.8%, the experience was mainly negative—'It was boring. I didn't learn much. Just a job'.

VET in Schools: A post-compulsory education perspective

Figure 12:   Students' views of work placement
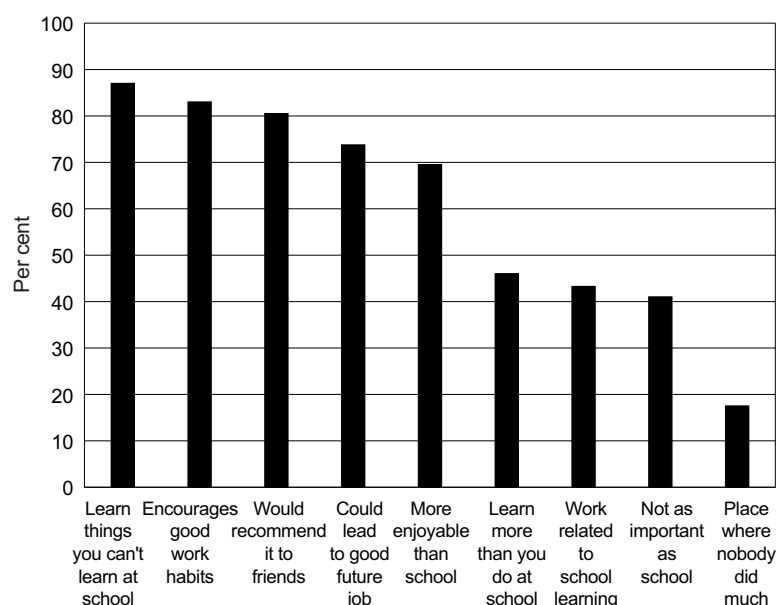
Comparing VET and non-VET schools

It has been argued in this report that schools with a strong commitment to VET are better placed to offer a range of curriculum programs and careers advice and support relevant to the diverse needs of young people. Data presented in the last chapter showed that teachers working in schools strongly committed to VET were more likely to believe that their school could offer a curriculum which catered for a range of students.

The views of students in Year 11 support this view. In fact, on a broad range of measures relating to their schools' effectiveness, students in schools strongly committed to VET were more positive.

Figure 13 presents students' views of the quality of their schools' careers advice and programs. Students in schools with strong VET programs consistently rated each item more highly than students in schools with limited programs. These differences occurred across a range of career-related services, from help in finding a job to advice about university. On each item in the chart, the differences were statistically significant.

Figure 14 examines the students' perceptions of the success of their schools in achieving a broader range of goals. Once again, students in schools with strong VET programs were more likely than students in schools with limited VET to agree that their school is successful in achieving each of these goals.

Given the implied commitment of these schools to vocational training, these differences might be expected in endeavours such as preparing students for a job or giving them access to workplace training. However, what is interesting is that they were also relevant to their schools' ability to achieve good academic results, provide assistance with difficulties and provide access to sporting and cultural programs. These latter items have nothing to do with VET. Yet the consistency of the pattern suggests that some of the characteristics of good VET schools might also be responsible for this broader range of positive outcomes.

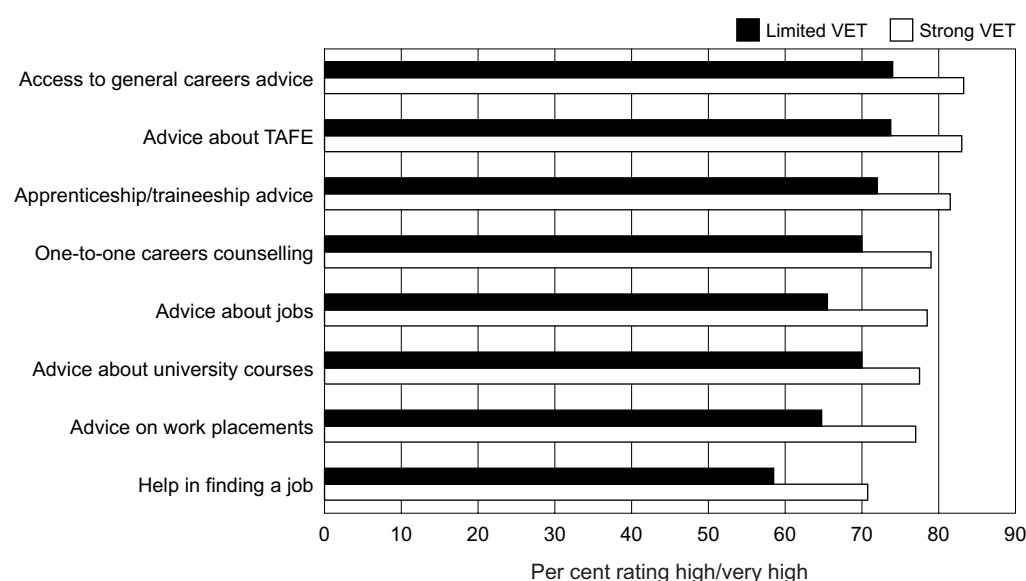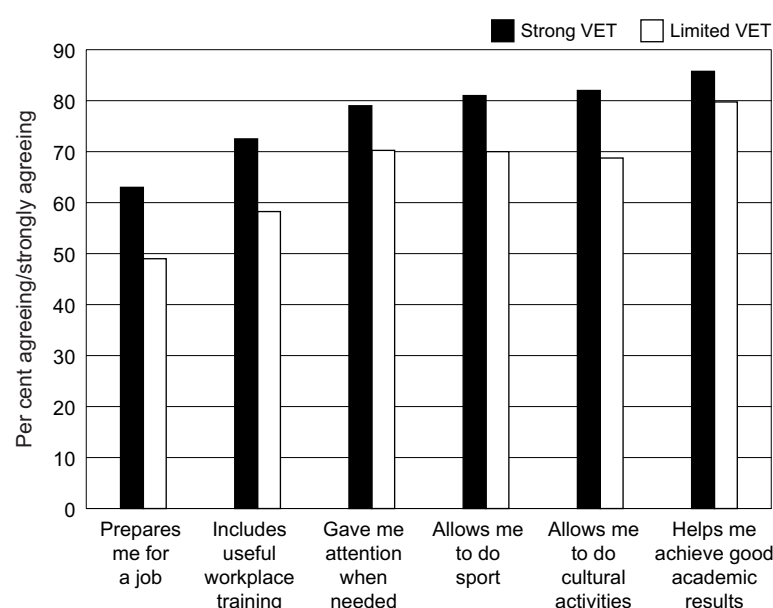**Figure 13:   Students' views of career services by school type**

Figure 14:   Students' views of school by school type

It is likely that these would include some of the characteristics of successful VET schools which were outlined in the chapter discussing the school view. Large enrolments and proactive leadership on the part of the principal would be likely to play a role, since the schools in our study with large numbers of students seem better able to offer a range of programs and services, and good leadership may be seen as having a pervasive influence on outcomes more generally. In relation to school size, the schools in our study with a strong VET program tended to be larger than those with a more limited VET program, although this study is not large enough to claim a statistically significant link between enrolments and breadth of program choice.

Barriers to VET

What then are the barriers to increasing VET participation? We know that there has already been significant growth in the number of young people undertaking VET in Schools programs. Since the

early 1990s, when approximately one in ten students who were enrolled in Years 11 and 12 participated in vocational education, reforms of the senior secondary curriculum in all states have seen participation in VET increase to nearly four in ten, or 153 616 students across Australia (Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2001). Nevertheless, many secondary students still do not enrol in VET in Schools programs and it has been speculated that VET participation may be approaching saturation point.

However, the data reported in figure 15 illustrate that barriers to VET remain. The reasons given by non-VET students in our study for not enrolling in VET programs indicate that non-participation is partly based on attitudinal barriers and partly based on structural factors of access. Interestingly, negative perceptions of VET per se do not seem to play a significant part in preventing students from taking on VET programs.

Figure 15:   Year 11 students' reasons for not enrolling in VET subjects
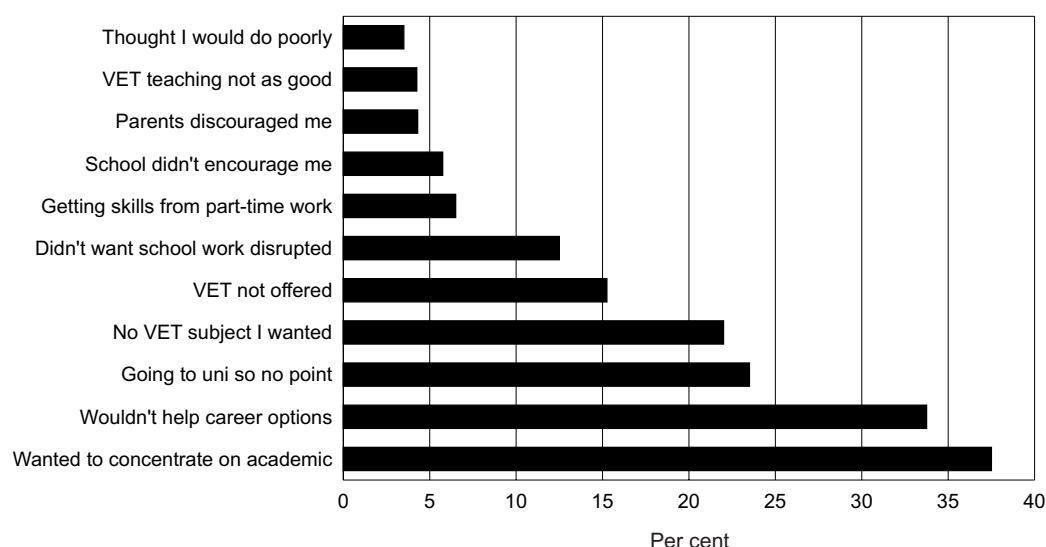

The main reasons given by these students for not enrolling in VET seem to be associated with the academic, university-oriented pathway of the student's program. They include the need to concentrate on academic courses and a view that, because they are going to university, they do not need VET. The perception that VET will not help their career choices is also strong.

However, there is also the question of access. For 15% of respondents, there was a perception that VET was not offered, and for nearly one-quarter there was no VET subject they wanted to do. Although all schools in the study offered *some* VET programs, there is a perception among some students that they are not accessible or that they do not meet their needs. Many students, when given the opportunity on their surveys to comment freely on their subjects, complained about timetabling clashes caused by the blocking of subjects. This was seen as limiting their options to subjects which could 'fit into their timetable'. This was echoed in the teachers' comments reported in previous chapters. Many students also expressed their disappointment over not being able to do specific VET subjects they wanted, because they were not offered. Again, the likelihood of this being an issue for students may well depend on the schools' level of commitment to VET, as is discussed below.

On the other hand, negative perceptions of VET were given relatively little importance by the respondents as reasons for avoiding VET. Very few students believed that VET programs are taught badly. And very few were willing to claim that their parents or their teachers had discouraged them from enrolling in VET. This would tend to support the views expressed in previous chapters that the image of VET may well be improving.

Figure 16 examines those items where a difference between schools with a strong commitment to VET and schools with a limited commitment to VET appear. This figure would seem to support a view that access to VET is less an issue for students in schools with a strong VET program, compared with those in schools with a limited VET program. On the other hand, a perception that VET does not fit in with their academic pathway seems to be more important for students in strong VET schools than it is for those in schools less committed to VET.

Figure 16:   Reasons for not enrolling in VET, by type of school
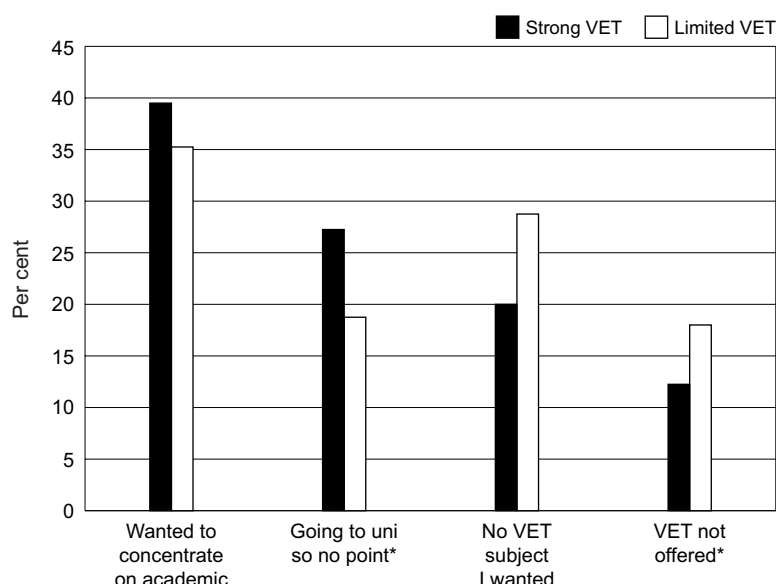
Note: *Statistically significant difference

In regard to other identified barriers, a series of questions regarding the ease with which VET fits into the timetable, whether it requires too much travel outside the school and whether it involves extra costs, indicates that financial costs are the main concern of students. The majority of respondents reported that VET fits easily into their overall school timetable (86.5%) and very few agreed that VET required too much travel outside school (15.3%). However, over half of these VET students agreed that VET involved extra costs to them personally.

It would seem that, as for the teachers in our study, the financial costs of VET are seen as one of the major concerns in the delivery of VET. This further supports the argument that cultural factors, while still a factor in preventing the take-up of VET, may no longer be as important as they once were. For the students and teachers in these schools, it is the cost of VET which is emerging as the major barrier to its development and delivery.

Summary

Students' views of the accessibility and delivery of VET in Schools and structured workplace learning programs are mainly positive, although there is also an acknowledgment of the limitations of VET and barriers to participation in it. These views are summarised below:

Views of VET in Schools

✧ VET students regard VET programs as an opportunity to broaden the overall scope of their career choices and to gain insight into particular industries while acquiring industry-specific skills through structured workplace training (work placements).

◇ VET students view VET programs as a tool which assists in developing closer links with employers thus enhancing employment prospects, but also as a way of developing the life skills necessary to assist in becoming independent individuals upon leaving school.

♦ VET programs offer students the opportunity to undertake workplace training (in addition to that offered as work experience), which contributes towards gaining an accredited qualification that may be used in a specific industry area.

◇ Students recognise that participation in VET expands their career options and that VET study does not rule out further academic study in the future.

Views of work experience and workplace training

◇ Students' perceptions of work experience are varied. Some consider work experience to be 'challenging and interesting most of the time' while others see this form of an introduction to employment as less stimulating and 'mostly routine' with little to be learnt.

◇ VET students who undertake a work placement are generally much more positive about this employment experience. They regard this event as one where they are able to learn things which cannot be learnt at school, which encourages good work habits and which will facilitate their entry into a 'good job' in the future. Many VET students also find work placements more enjoyable than school.

Comparing VET and non-VET schools

◇ Students attending schools which are strongly committed to VET rate careers advice and associated programs more highly than students attending schools with a limited VET focus.

◇ Students see schools demonstrating a strong VET commitment as exhibiting a greater capacity to achieve good academic results, to assist students with various difficulties and also to make sporting and cultural activities accessible.

◇ Students attending strongly committed VET schools also rate consistently higher, factors such as advice and assistance with employment, TAFE and university choices, apprenticeships/traineeships and work placements.

◇ Students in schools strongly committed to VET programs also rate more highly, the support offered on job preparation, access to sporting and cultural programs, and in achieving high academic results.

Barriers to VET

◇ Barriers to the acceptance and undertaking of VET programs at secondary school level seem to be more structural than social or attitudinal.

◇ The survey data suggest that students in strong VET schools who do not enrol in VET tend not to do so because they want to pursue a more academic course of study, or because VET study would not assist them in attaining university.

◇ Students not enrolled in VET in Schools with only a limited VET focus are more likely to suggest that they did not enrol in it because there was no VET program offered by the school, or their particular VET subject was not offered.

◇ The costs involved in undertaking VET are an important issue for students in being able to access such courses. Factors such as timetabling of VET and travelling to and from external VET providers are of less concern.

Student pathways

This chapter is based on student destinations data collected as part of the exit survey of the 2001 cohort of Year 12 students, which was conducted in September–October 2002. It is based on 403 returned surveys from nine of the research schools.

The pathway into study and work

Past research suggests that students who enrol in VET in Schools subjects and those who do not have quite different study and employment destinations when they leave school (Lamb, Long & Malley 1998; Walstab et al. 2002; Polesel, Teese & O'Brien 2001). The literature also points to the fact that VET in Schools graduates access a wide range of study and labour market destinations. A recent Victorian study notes, for example, that VET in Schools graduates are more likely to end up in full-time work or in apprenticeships or traineeships than their non-VET peers (Polesel & Teese, forthcoming). They are also more likely to enrol in TAFE than are other school graduates. However, university remains an important destination for significant numbers of VET in Schools graduates—over one in five in the study quoted above. This underlines the breadth of the VET in Schools program as a platform for accessing a variety of work and study destinations. The current study confirms these findings.

Figures 17 and 18 compare the post-schooling destinations of VET and non-VET students who exited the sample schools at the end of 2001. The first chart shows that non-VET students were approximately twice as likely to go to university as their VET classmates. This is in line with the findings from similar studies in the past. Also in keeping with past studies is the fact that approximately one-fifth of the VET graduates used their studies to access a university destination. The rates of entry to TAFE (and other VET providers) reverse this pattern, with the VET in Schools graduates in the study much more likely than their non-VET peers to end up in a VET provider. Again, this is reflected in past studies. Overall, the proportion of VET in Schools students not accessing a study destination is 9.3% higher than for non-VET students.

This latter finding is explained when we examine the labour market destinations of these young people. The VET in Schools graduates were much more likely than their non-VET peers to enter full-time work and apprenticeships and traineeships, an unsurprising finding given the vocational orientation of their senior certificate studies. VET in Schools graduates were also more likely to be in the labour force overall.

What is surprising then is that their unemployment rate was also lower than that of their non-VET in Schools classmates. Despite a greater likelihood of entering the labour market without further study (and consequently a greater dependence on work), they were less likely to be unemployed—a finding which confirms the value of VET in Schools as a tool for accessing jobs and also highlights its flexibility in helping students access a range of post-schooling destinations.
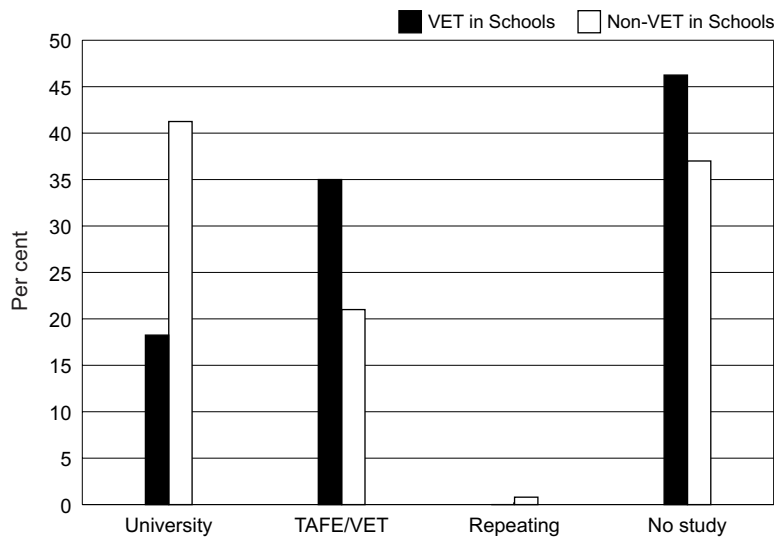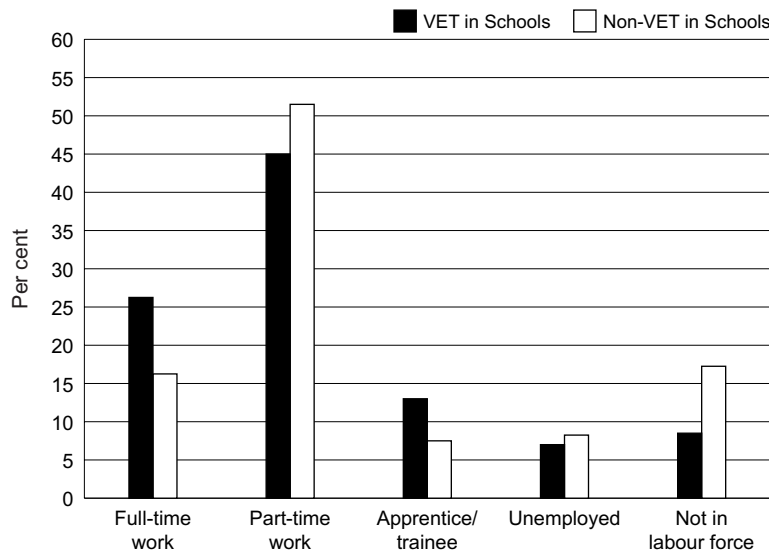
Figure 17:   Study destinations

Figure 18:   Labour market destinations

Comparing the level of study accessed in TAFE by VET and non-VET school graduates provides further confirmation of the value of the VET in Schools program. The vast majority of these entrants to post-schooling VET (94%) entered the former of these two options—TAFE. Figure 19 shows that the VET in Schools group was most likely to enrol in TAFE at certificate III level (44.4%) or certificate IV, diploma or advanced diploma level (50%). Only 5.6% enrolled in entry-level courses.

By contrast, students who graduated from 'mainstream' programs in their senior certificate were more likely than their VET in Schools peers to enter at the higher level (certificate IV and above), a finding which may reflect their more academic orientation at school. But interestingly, they were less likely to enter certificate III courses and more likely to enter certificate I and II courses, although the differences at the entry level were not large.

Figure 19:   Level of TAFE accessed
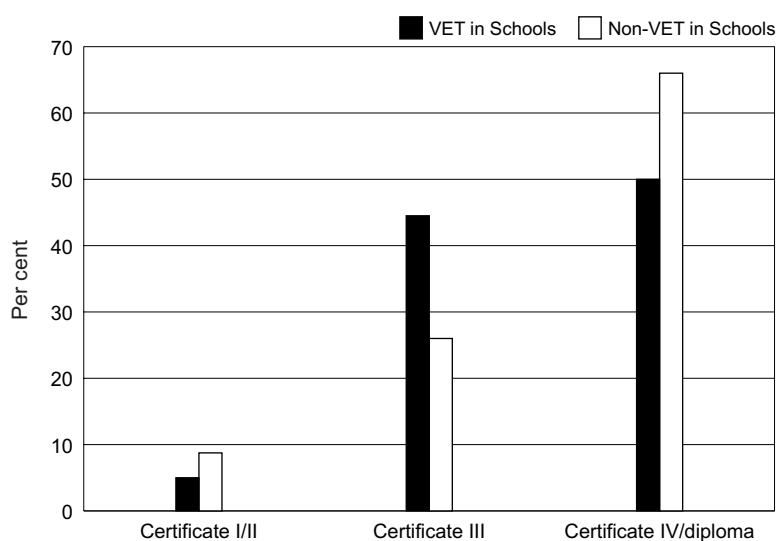
The experience of unemployment

The proportion of VET in Schools students nominating themselves as unemployed was very low—some 6.8% of the overall cohort. This was slightly lower than the rate for non-VET in Schools graduates, which was 8.4%, and was evidence of good labour market outcomes for students who enrol in VET studies while at school.

However, the survey of school leavers also shows that VET in Schools graduates were more likely to have been in work *for most of the time* since leaving school and were less likely to have been unemployed for long periods since leaving school (see figure 20). While 81.4% of VET in Schools graduates reported that they had a job for most of the time, the same was true for only 68.1% of mainstream graduates. While this is partly due to the lesser likelihood of the latter group entering the labour market, the non-VET group was also almost twice as likely as the VET in Schools graduates to have been unemployed for most of the time since leaving school. They were also more likely to have had approximately equal periods of employment and unemployment since leaving school. Overall, these data were indicative of the benefits which may be accruing to VET in Schools graduates at least in the short term with regard to their labour market experience and the avoidance of long periods of unemployment.

Figure 20:   Labour market experience of VET in Schools/non-VET in Schools graduates

Figure 21:   School leavers' views of careers education and guidance as 'very useful'
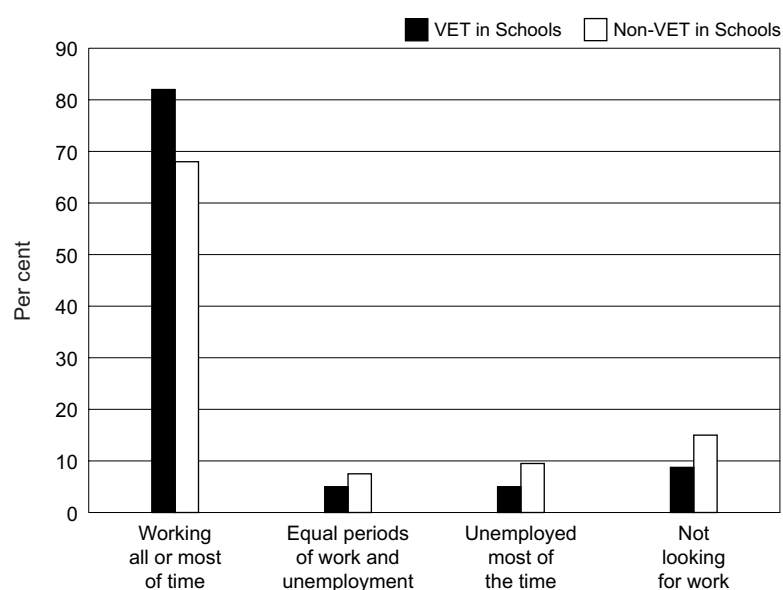
Views of careers education and guidance

In the previous chapter, Year 11 students' views of careers education and guidance were examined in the context of their schools' commitment to VET. Students in schools highly committed to VET generally gave a more positive assessment of their schools' efforts in this field than those in schools less committed to VET. This section examines school leavers' views of careers education and guidance. These also provide us with useful data regarding the perceptions of different groups of students, but in this case, the major differences in attitude were between students who had gone on to further study and those who had not (see figures 21 and 22).
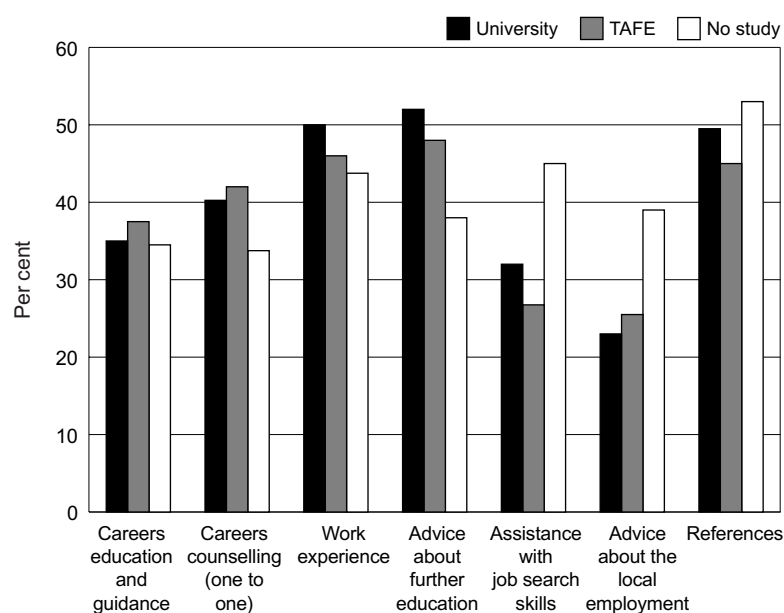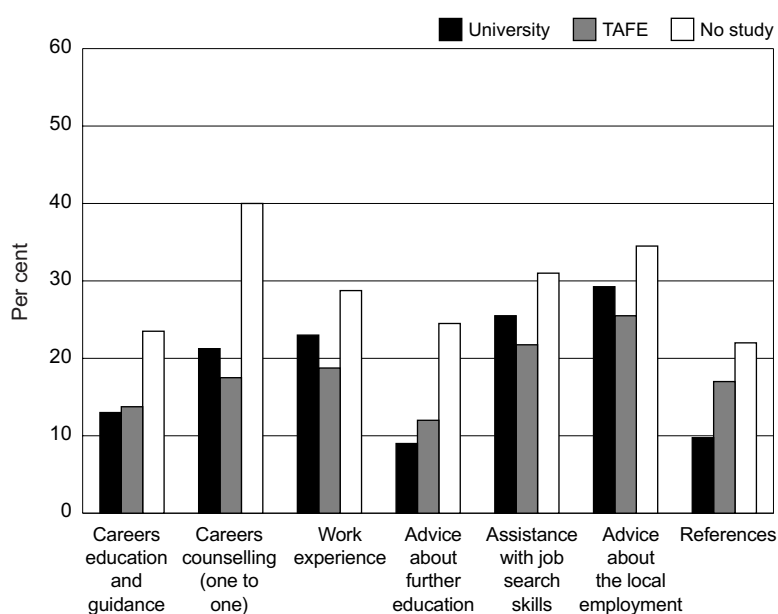
Figure 22: School leavers' views of careers education and guidance as 'not useful'

Figures 21 and 22 reveal views regarding specific aspects of careers education and guidance which are largely dependent on the school leaver's study destination—university, TAFE or no study. For example, figure 21 shows that there were only small differences in the proportions of the three groups finding 'careers education and guidance' and 'one-to-one careers counselling' to be very useful. However, larger differences appeared between the three groups in relation to more specific aspects of careers guidance. University and TAFE students were much more likely to have found the advice they received on further education very useful than did those who did not enter further study. Similarly, those studying were much more likely to rate highly the assistance they received with job search skills and advice on local employment than were those who went to university or TAFE.

However, figure 22 shows that those school leavers who did not enter further study were also more likely than their peers to classify the advice they received in each category as 'not useful'. This was so in all categories, even in those relating to job search skills and advice about local employment, where their assessments clustered at the two extremes of the scale—'not useful' and 'very useful'. We may interpret these findings as supporting a view of careers education and guidance which works more effectively for those students who go on to further study in university or TAFE. Even in those areas relating to job skills and employment, where students were more likely to have received useful information than did their tertiary-bound peers, approximately one-third characterised the advice they received as being of no use.

Summary

The great strength of the VET in Schools program is its flexibility in catering for the learning needs of a range of students and in preparing and creating pathways into a range of post-schooling destinations. This strength is highlighted by the evidence presented in this chapter which suggests that VET in Schools is able to achieve these outcomes despite the pressure placed on it to cater for a range of ability needs and the consequently higher proportions of academically weaker students who enrol in it.

The data suggest that VET graduates are not only more likely to move into full-time work, apprenticeships or traineeships after the completion of their secondary studies, but they are also more likely to enter the labour force overall, or pursue VET options through TAFE institutions,

when compared with non-VET graduates. VET students also seem to be less likely to find themselves unemployed or to have been unemployed for long periods of time since leaving school.

Data presented in this chapter also indicate that, while approximately 20% of all VET graduates undertake university study, VET participants are more likely to pursue post-secondary study in VET. On the other hand, non-VET students demonstrate twice the likelihood of undertaking university study following the completion of their senior certificate. Of the students entering post-schooling VET (both VET and non-VET graduates), 94% do so through a TAFE institution, and while VET graduates seem more likely to enrol in TAFE at certificate III level, non-VET graduates appear more inclined to enrol in TAFE study at certificate IV or diploma level, and less likely to enrol in TAFE at certificate III level.

The data also support a view of schools' careers education and guidance as being more in tune with the needs of tertiary education-bound students than of those who enter the labour market without further training.

Whatever the motivating factors, it would appear that participation in VET in Schools clearly offers advantages in attaining employment or undertaking further vocationally oriented study in any field. However, it is also evident that schools need to make the advice they offer to students who are not planning further study more relevant.

Conclusion

In the context of significant growth in the provision of VET in Schools programs in the past decade, this study sought to investigate the place of VET in school culture and policy, and to identify the factors which influence the success of VET programs. The study also investigated cross-sectoral tensions associated with the delivery of VET in Schools programs.

The study gathered information from 12 schools and six TAFE institutes in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. The school data represented the views of over 300 teachers, over 1100 Year 11 students and over 400 exit Year 12 students.

This chapter addresses the research questions specified at the outset of the project.

What are the factors within a school culture which support a successful VET program?

The development of good VET programs was seen by teachers to depend on both attitudinal change (among staff and the school community) and structural change (in the school's operation). To achieve change at both these levels, a wholly supportive principal was seen to be essential in order to ensure innovative use of available funds, time release to allow teachers to focus on the heavy administrative demands of VET, and the establishment of a team of dedicated VET staff, rather than individuals acting in isolation.

Other characteristics associated with sites which were able to offer more comprehensive VET programs included:

✧ high enrolments

✧ ability to offer courses on a cost-neutral basis or to charge students for courses

✧ view of VET as improving learning

✧ positive, modern view of VET

✧ proximity to a TAFE

✧ good relationship with TAFE.

What cultural factors inhibit the successful development of VET options within school curricula?

Although some evidence of resistance to VET was observed, issues associated with adequately resourcing VET programs seemed to be more important. Factors which were seen to limit the ability of schools to provide quality TAFE programs and/or expand existing provision included:

✧ shortage of adequately trained teachers prepared to accept the additional workloads associated with VET teaching

✧ costs associated with training teachers to the standards needed to meet Australian Quality Training Framework compliance (including time release for industrial experience)

✧ providing adequate facilities for delivering VET within the school (and the costs associated with updating aged facilities or building new ones)

✧ costs of 'buying in' provision from a TAFE (or other) provider

✧ fees charged to students.

Consistent with the qualitative findings reported above, teachers were also less concerned with 'resistance' per se than they were with issues associated with the resourcing of VET programs, including the provision of infrastructure and training, and the costs of delivering VET. The majority of VET teachers perceived the following as significant resource issues associated with VET provision:

✧ the extra workload and responsibility generated by VET (for example, liaising with employers and TAFE, increased paperwork) compared with mainstream subjects

✧ fees and charges to students, which place significant limitations on VET provision

✧ shortage of adequately trained teachers

✧ inadequate facilities and resources for delivering VET on site

✧ resources (time, money, effort) needed for compliance with Australian Quality Training Framework requirements

✧ internal pressures, such as lack of support from principal, timetabling constraints, lack of commitment from other teachers.

From a student's point of view, both attitudinal and structural barriers were identified as being important. The main reasons for not enrolling in VET were associated with an academic, university-oriented trajectory, and an associated perception that it is not relevant to their future study and career plans. This view was more likely in schools with strong VET programs, whereas students in schools with limited VET programs were more likely to cite reasons associated with limited access, such as VET not offered, or that there was no VET subject they wanted to do.

However, further analysis indicated that an important barrier to participation was also cost. This was seen as more important than other school-related issues, such as timetabling constraints or the need to travel outside school. Financial costs were also identified by teachers as the main barrier to student participation in VET programs, due to the need to charge fees.

Negative perceptions of VET were given relatively little importance by the respondents as reasons for avoiding VET. Very few students believed that VET programs are taught badly, and few were willing to claim that their parents or their teachers had discouraged them from enrolling in VET. This tends to corroborate the positive views of teachers towards VET and highlights the increasing acceptance of VET in the senior secondary curriculum.

What do teachers think of VET and how united are they in their views and attitudes regarding VET?

In most of the schools in our study, the consensus was that VET plays an essential role in making the curriculum inclusive of a broader range of needs. VET was also viewed as a useful means of improving learning, giving many students a chance of success at school, some for the first time.

While teacher sentiment was generally very positive towards the role and effectiveness of VET programs in delivering positive educational outcomes for secondary students, there still remain a number of key issues which significantly influence the availability and accessibility of VET programs. These are summarised as follows:

✧ Teachers were generally very positive about VET. Virtually the entire sample agreed that students struggling with the mainstream curriculum and those intending to leave school early need VET programs.

✧ Similarly high proportions of teachers saw the value of VET for students who are interested in technology or business, regardless of their ability, and for students who are only average academically.

✧ Over three-quarters felt that vocational education and training is important even for those students who are above average academically.

✧ Teachers valued the role of work placement in increasing students' self-confidence.

◇ In a strong indication of support for non-university pathways, teachers endorsed the role of schools in creating links with TAFE and employers, and in providing advice about apprenticeships, traineeships and employment to an even greater extent than the provision of advice about university.

◇ Schools with strong VET programs ('strong VET' schools) were judged by teachers to be better able than 'limited VET' schools to manage diversity in the way of a varied curriculum, stimulating activities and the availability of programs for high achievers.

◇ However, on the other measures—discipline policy, extra-curricular activities and student counselling—'strong VET' schools were perceived as less successful than the 'limited VET' schools, although these findings may be related to the nature of the clientele in the latter group of schools.

The issue of whether teachers in the same school tend to be united in their views of VET arises principally in relation to the role of VET for students from different academic backgrounds. VET and non-VET teachers differed in their opinions of which groups should be accommodated by VET programs. Non-VET teachers appeared more inclined to recommend VET programs for students in Year 10 or below, and who are average academically, whereas VET teachers strongly supported the introduction of VET only in Years 11 and 12, and advocated VET programs for students of all skill levels, including students who are above average academically.

The interview data supported these findings but also identified issues of resourcing and timetabling as potential sources of division. Some teachers saw the commitment of resources to VET as potentially reducing the resources available for other subject areas, and some teachers remained concerned that work placements and timetabling and travel issues might affect the students' attendance in other subjects.

In careers education and guidance, how well profiled are employment, apprenticeship and VET options for students with a range of needs and aspirations?

Students in schools with strong VET programs were more positive than students in schools with limited programs about the quality of their school's career-related services, including advice and assistance with employment, and information about university and TAFE courses. Moreover, these students were more likely than students in schools with limited VET to endorse the success of their school in a broader range of measures relating to their school's effectiveness, such as achieving high academic results, and providing access to cultural and sporting activities. Large enrolments and good leadership, seen by the teachers in this study as crucial to the success of VET, are also likely to have contributed to the success of these schools in providing a range of quality programs and services.

From a teacher's point of view, advising students about employment, apprenticeships, TAFE and university were all regarded as important by a majority of teachers, with over 80% in each case describing these kinds of advice as 'very important'. However, taking the more active step of actually creating links with employers or with TAFE, while still regarded as important by the majority of teachers, was less likely to generate the view that this was 'very' important. It is evident that teachers have taken on board the need to provide students with a broad range of careers advice, but it may be the case that the more time-consuming and resource-intensive creation of links with VET providers and employers which are necessary to translate this advice into meaningful careers learning for students is somewhat harder to achieve. Moreover, although a number of schools indicated that they took students to the local TAFE for information sessions and provided them with literature about TAFE options, there was no evidence of coordinated approaches to the provision of careers education and guidance programs.

Students' views of careers education and guidance were also dependent on their post-schooling study destinations. University and TAFE students were much more likely to have found the advice they received on further education very useful than those who did not enter study. Similarly, those studying were much more likely to rate highly the assistance they received with job search skills and

advice on local employment than those who went to university or TAFE. However, school leavers who did not enter further study were also more likely than their peers to classify the advice they received in each category as 'not useful'. This was so even in those categories relating to job search skills and advice about local employment, where their assessments clustered at the two extremes of the scale—'not useful' and 'very useful'. We may interpret these findings as supporting a view of careers education and guidance which works more effectively for those students who go on to further study in university or TAFE.

In developing curriculum policy with respect to VET, do schools consider the range of views and post-school destinations of students?

In line with previous research, non-VET students were about twice as likely to go to university as their VET counterparts. Also in keeping with past studies is the fact that approximately one-fifth of the VET graduates used their studies to access a university destination. The rates of entry to TAFE (and other VET providers) reverse this pattern, with VET graduates in the study twice as likely as their non-VET peers to study through a VET provider. VET graduates were much more likely to enter full-time work and apprenticeships and traineeships, which is consistent with the vocational orientation of their senior certificate studies. These findings support an argument that schools with VET are achieving success in catering for the post-school destinations of their students.

Despite a greater likelihood of entering the labour market without further study (and consequently a greater dependence on work), VET graduates were less likely to be unemployed, a finding which confirms the value of VET in Schools as a tool for accessing jobs, and indeed a range of post-schooling destinations.

VET and non-VET students appear to access TAFE (the main provider of post-school VET) in different ways. VET in Schools graduates are more likely than their non-VET peers to enter TAFE at certificate III level, which suggests that that they are building on their VET experiences at school. By contrast, non-VET graduates were more likely to enter TAFE at certificate IV and above (reflecting a more academic orientation at school) or, alternatively, at certificate I and II level. This 'split' in the non-VET cohort suggests that VET programs delivered a tangible advantage to many VET students which was not available to their non-VET counterparts. Thus there appears to be a group of students who stand to benefit from VET programs at school whose needs are not being adequately accommodated by the traditional academic curriculum.

Further evidence for this argument may be found in the data relating to students' views of work placement and their perception of their schools' ability to prepare them for the workforce. Students strongly expressed a need for work placement and practical learning experiences. Students in schools with strong VET programs were more likely to agree that these needs are being met. The answer to the research question of whether students' views are factored into schools' decision-making processes then would seem to depend on whether or not the school is prepared to extend its commitment to these issues to the establishment of a strong VET in Schools program.

The strength of the VET in Schools program appears to be its flexibility in catering for the diverse learning needs of school students, and in preparing pathways into a range of post-schooling destinations. This strength is highlighted by the evidence presented in this report that VET in Schools is able to achieve these outcomes despite the pressure on it to cater for a range of ability levels and the consequently higher proportions of academically weaker students who enrol in it.

How do regional TAFE institutes view their role in the delivery of VET in Schools programs and in catering for early school leavers and school completers?

The views of TAFE staff on the main aspects of the relationship with schools and with a school-aged clientele may be summarised as follows:

◇ TAFE institutes differ in the roles they play for early leavers. Very young early leavers (13- and 14-year-olds) are not regarded as suited to most TAFE environments.

✧ There is a perception that the range of programs available from TAFE institutes for early leavers has narrowed in recent years.

✧ TAFE staff question whether they have the experience and resources to deal adequately with the needs of this group.

✧ TAFE questions the quality of much of the training offered in VET in Schools courses. The lack of adequately trained and experienced staff is seen as a major problem.

✧ There is a perception that TAFE and schools are carving out niches in the training market, whereby schools provide the kinds of courses their facilities and staff profile will allow, while TAFE provides training which schools cannot offer from within their own resources.

✧ Better cooperation between the VET sector and the schools sector is needed to avoid wasteful duplication of resources.

✧ There seems to be a greater acceptance in schools of TAFE as a legitimate post-schooling option for students completing school, although resistance in some schools continues.

✧ There is a perception that many school leavers continue to reject places offered in TAFE courses.

✧ Application for a TAFE place through a tertiary admissions committee does not suit all TAFE applicants.

Summary

These findings are indicative of a sea change in schools. Resistance remains among some teachers. There is a view among some in the more academically inclined subject departments that VET is disruptive, that it does not fit easily into the timetable, or that it is simply not needed. But in the schools in this study, teachers such as these appear to be in the minority. For most, VET plays an essential role in managing diversity, in improving learning and in securing a range of good outcomes for school leavers. Even among non-VET teachers, there is a majority view that VET is needed, and it is effective.

Among students also, VET is seen as providing opportunities and pathways which are essential. Alternatives to the traditional pathway to university are provided in VET programs, giving these young people a senior schooling experience which caters for their diverse needs and learning styles. It would seem that students, if they choose not to undertake VET, do so because it does not fit their view of an academic pathway, rather than because they view it negatively. Students enrol in VET to widen career options, to obtain workplace training and to gain a VET qualification. More than half of the students enrolled in VET to gain access to better part-time work than would be available without training, reflecting the importance of part-time work to students in senior secondary school and in university.

Students' feedback strongly suggests that VET has satisfied their need for work-related skills and experience, and that the work placement has contributed to increasing their self-confidence. There is also encouraging data to suggest that VET has contributed to student learning more generally. Re-engaging disaffected learners and creating pathways to further education and training (in addition to the well-trodden university pathway) are important steps in forming the confident lifelong learners of the future.

The feedback from TAFE staff seems to confirm these views. There is an acknowledgement that schools and students are beginning to view VET (and consequently TAFE itself) in a more favourable light. By valuing VET, schools are also paving the way for a more positive view of TAFE as a post-schooling option.

Yet, despite these changing views, problems remain. These seem to be problems rooted in the institutional structures of schools and in the financial arrangements which constrain the relationship between the sectors. All of the stakeholders have focused on the financial difficulties involved in

accessing VET in Schools programs. The vexed relationships between individual schools and individual TAFE institutes require resolution of the institutional arrangements which make productive and efficient cooperation so difficult. From the students' point of view, the financial demands of VET (often most prevalent in those schools with the least capacity to address them) make access to programs which can improve both the schooling experience and the prospect of future pathways more difficult.

Institutional arrangements relating to access to senior secondary VET curriculum and accreditation arrangements are somewhat different from state to state. Yet, in the schools in the three states chosen for this study, the themes which run through this report are common ones. While both TAFE institutes and schools have done much to accommodate the need for high-quality VET programs for school students, many issues need to be addressed. The need for funding and administrative flexibility is chief among them. While access to VET remains complex and troublesome, residual resistance to VET will remain and some students who need VET programs will continue to miss out.

There is a need for a frank appraisal of the issues facing schools in different settings if they are to offer high-quality VET programs to all students who need them. These issues include access to TAFE programs, funding arrangements, school size, isolation and the provision of trained teaching staff. These issues all involve funding, and affect different schools in different ways. Unless adequate acknowledgment of the need to provide quality VET in a range of settings (and not just in those where it is easy) is made, access to VET will continue to be limited for many young people in Australian schools.

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