

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



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

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

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

**what the  
research  
says for...  
government  
& policy-  
makers**

## What are vocational streams?

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

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

## Why is this research important to government and policy-makers?

Vocational streams provide a framework that government and policy-makers could use to further understand how educational and occupational pathways and the links between qualifications and the labour market could be improved.

To further align education with the realities of the labour market, a number of objectives for government and policy-makers are highlighted in the research. Overall these revolve around improving the relationship between education and work by supporting the development of vocational streams.

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

## Key implications for government and policy-makers

The research points to:

- redeveloping VET qualifications, along with industry and educational institutions, to produce ‘adaptive capacities’, which are the capacities individuals need to respond to changes in work and in society
- mandating English and mathematics in the school curriculum as foundational knowledge that students will need in their post-school studies
- building sustainable models of VET in Schools by identifying and incorporating vocational streams in the senior school curriculum to enable students to study subjects related to their proposed vocational field of practice
- refocusing VET in Schools as a pathway to post-school VET or apprenticeships in skilled occupations rather than as a pathway to a job, as it is increasingly difficult to move directly into a meaningful job from a VET in Schools outcome alone
- differentiating the approach to tertiary education pathways to take account of the different ways by which they are used in the labour market. This approach will go beyond linear pathways in the various fields of education to one that supports the way in which graduates use qualifications to build their careers. All qualifications would share the same three purposes: labour market entry or progression; access to higher-level studies; and widened participation for disadvantaged students. These will vary in their emphasis and the way in which they are implemented
- exploring and developing ‘middle-level’ occupations that link lower- and higher-skilled occupations in vocational streams, drawing on the combined experience of higher education, vocational and industry expertise.

To be effective, tertiary education policy could be reformed with reference to broader industry and labour market objectives. In the development of tertiary education policy, consideration needs to be given to the different labour market characteristics of different qualifications. This is a challenge as one size does not fit all.

Reform is possible in areas where employers, unions, professional associations, occupational and accrediting bodies, educational institutions and government share common objectives. Effective collaboration and the investment of resources across stakeholders will help to sustain deeper changes over time.

### For more information

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



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