

## SUBMISSION TO THE EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE'S **Inquiry into the delivery of the Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) program**

Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc. Submission  
9 August 2017

### **About WACSSO**

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc. (WACSSO) is the peak body representing parents of public school children in Western Australia. WACSSO provides services and representation at State and National level to 645 Parents and Citizens Associations (P&Cs), four school boards and two school councils in Western Australia. WACSSO is largely a volunteer organisation made up of a President and State Councillors (representatives) from geographically-based electorates and as such, the organisation has a wide representative reach across the state.

Through consultation with external organisations and affiliates, WACSSO has identified several key points for the Education and Health Standing Committee's consideration. We have responded to the following discussion points:

1. How well the program is meeting the needs of schools, students and industry
2. Challenges for regional and remote areas
3. Resourcing of the program

### **Contact**

Ms Kylie Catto

WACSSO President

0477 644 000 • [president@wacssso.wa.edu.au](mailto:president@wacssso.wa.edu.au) • PO Box 6295 East Perth, WA 6892

### **Abbreviations**

ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ESS	Employer Satisfaction Survey
IBT	Institutional Based Training
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SES	Student Experience Survey
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETiS	Vocational Education and Training in Schools
WACE	Western Australian Certificate of Education
WACSSO	Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc

## HOW WELL THE PROGRAM IS MEETING THE NEEDS OF SCHOOLS, STUDENTS AND INDUSTRY

It goes without saying that the VETiS (Vocational Education and Training in Schools) program is different from school to school, with each school administration left to make their own local decisions around what suits their students and their budgets. Parents and schools have reported an increase in students staying on for, and more readily engaging with, years 10-12 of their education when they have the opportunity to undertake VET studies. Feedback from our affiliates tells us that the VETiS program is running adequately, providing students the opportunity to obtain the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) using a certificate qualification (usually II or III) and General Courses; some students study more than one certificate with most certificates running over the course of two years.

We also know that some ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) students are also studying the certificates. VET is a wonderful opportunity to complement or to provide an alternative route/pathway to graduation, TAFE or university. In saying this, under the student centred funding model, students are funded as one or the other (ATAR or VET) but not both – it is far less common now for schools to accommodate an ATAR student wanting to complement their studies with a certificate course, and often it comes at a cost to the family. The Western Australian Auditor General's report, Vocational Education and Training for Year 11 and 12 Students in Public Schools (2016, p.23), discusses the idea that VET activity in schools is now supported by a more equitable and transparent funding system. However, the loading does not cover the full cost to schools of delivering VET and many schools also charge fees ranging from nominal amounts up to a few hundred dollars, similar to fees charged for general and ATAR study.<sup>i</sup> In a Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council report, released April 2016, recognises that the Department of Education's funding approach for VET affords necessary flexibility for schools to respond to local conditions, whilst raising concerns that individualised approaches may also run the risk of producing inconsistencies in policy application and in practice, even between schools in close geographical proximity.<sup>ii</sup>

The general consensus is that the VETiS program meets the needs of students as it typically gives the student direct, industry specific instruction from trainers, who have worked in the relevant industries, meet current industry needs and, at the very least, hold the qualification that is being delivered to the students. Industry expects<sup>iii</sup> that VETiS is delivered in the following way to ensure successful completion of the certificate:

- students have access to industry standard equipment
- delivery by people with relevant and current industry experience, and
- it meets expectations as to volume of learning and includes time in the actual workplace.

We see schools running into trouble when they begin to offer certificates that fell into the “orange flag” category of the VET Qualifications Register for Secondary Students.<sup>iv</sup> This category denotes that not all delivery options are supported or industry has concerns about a delivery option. Orange flag qualifications are often unlikely to be successfully delivered in school settings due to institutional based training (IBT), which enables

students to undertake a nationally recognised qualification without a formal employment arrangement, not being supported or auspicing being considered a high risk. Essentially, to successfully deliver an orange flag qualification schools need to be able to deliver education and training steeped in industry specific instruction and placement, which in many instances is unachievable due to resourcing hindrances.

WACSSO has been receiving an increased number of reports from teachers, students and parents about the difficulty of securing work placements for VET students. In times of economic hardship, many businesses are closing, some are reducing staff numbers and they aren't always able to host students. Where limited certificate options are offered by a local school it creates increased competition for access to work placements. We acknowledge the strong support of government education by many businesses across Western Australia.

Government agencies deliver a wide range of services and are located throughout the state. We see an opportunity for the Government to make an investment in education by committing to having agencies host work placements for VET students. Not only will this dramatically increase the number of work placements available, it will relieve the pressure on other businesses struggling to cater for the need. Where established agreements are in place it can reduce the administrative burden and time consuming process of staff trying, often unsuccessfully, to secure future placements. It would also give better certainty to schools when determining what certificates are able to be offered for study. WACSSO has sought a commitment from the State Government to provide work placements in government agencies for senior school students undertaking VET studies in government schools, by developing a partnership program with the Department of Education. These enquiries have so far been met with enthusiasm and we are eager to see the plan take effect.

One particular anecdote that stood out to us in our consultation with affiliates was the cautionary tale that students who go through the VETiS program and attain their desired qualification are actually worse off having a certificate coming out of school. Reason being, employees will have to pay them more than an apprentice with no qualification. So, the tale goes that they are less employable because they will have to be paid at a higher level and the employer supposedly has to undo all of the "damage" caused by different Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) participating in the VETiS program who fail to transfer industry specific knowledge and skills to the student. Further to this point, the 2016 RREAC report points out that:

"it is generally accepted by industry training councils that qualifications over a Certificate II would be difficult for a student to achieve, particularly if they don't have access to a workplace; students would be unable to achieve the occupational outcomes of the qualification. There have been instances in regional locations where students have undertaken qualifications at Certificate IV level in subjects such as Business. RREAC has been advised that industry views have been expressed that, generally, if students do get a job in the industry, their skill levels are not satisfactory."<sup>v</sup>

It's important to note here that currently underemployment is at 18% of the youth labour force, the highest in the 40 years since it has been counted.<sup>vi</sup> VETiS, as a pathway to employment not just an engagement tool, should

be positioning students to exit secondary education skilled appropriately, at a level consistent with development and remuneration to ensure maximum career opportunity.

In a recent inquiry into *Innovation and creativity: workforce for the new economy* by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, recommendations were handed down to reform the delivery of VET in order to adequately meet the needs of schools, students and industry into the future. This research is critical in delivering a timely audit of what skills our students will need throughout their careers and what measures we can take to ensure these are taught. The inquiry also revealed room to improve the connection between VET and higher education. Some notable recommendations<sup>vii</sup> include:

#### Recommendation 16

3.106 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government's National Science and Innovation Agenda be expanded to include the VET sector.

#### Recommendation 17

3.108 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government funding to VET maximises the provision of work integrated learning opportunities.

#### Recommendation 18

3.109 The Committee recommends that the VET and tertiary education sectors should collaborate to ensure that the competencies taught in certificate IV, diploma and other VET qualifications are linked to corresponding bachelor degrees; and, design and deliver bridging courses to explicitly teach the STEM skills students may have missed out on at the secondary school level, but which are required to successfully complete tertiary qualifications.

In regards to meeting the needs of industry and skilling our students for the future, VET is incredibly important in expanding the National Science and Innovation Agenda that is increasingly being transfused into the Australian curriculum in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The inquiry took a look at the key role VET can play in developing and maintaining the STEM skills of the Australian workforce. It was pointed out that "much of the nation's STEM workforce already hold VET qualifications and find it less time consuming and less costly to maintain /increase their qualifications through a short VET course as opposed to a university course."<sup>viii</sup>

Lastly, there is a national dialogue that suggests the response to issues with VET is often to say that private (not for profit and for profit) providers should all be shut down and TAFE should be the sole provider. This suggestion assumes all problems would be solved by shutting down the non-TAFE providers. However, private providers nationally deliver around 3 million of the 4.5 million VET enrolments annually and student and industry satisfaction is well above 80% year in-year out<sup>ix</sup>. When looking at recent NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) data, and documents like the 2016 Student Experience Survey (SES) National Report of higher education undergraduate students and the 2016 Employer Satisfaction Survey (ESS) National Report,

which were released by the Department of Education and Training on 12 April 2017, it is clear that diversity in the system is actually of benefit and helps to meet the needs of students participating in the VETiS program.

## **CHALLENGES FOR REGIONAL AND REMOTE AREAS**

Affiliated schools across the state (metro, regional and beyond) report great disparity between the cost of certificates offered to students at one school, compared to the cost of the same certificates at neighbouring schools. In an extract from Hansard 10 May 2016 regarding the range of Certificate II Courses available at schools in the South West Region and the associated costs, it is evident there is a huge disparity between schools. For example a Certificate II in Plumbing ranges from \$0 to \$320 to \$3,320.<sup>x</sup> While this information is specific to the South West, the issue of disparity is state wide.

The training needs of students in regional communities are not always being adequately met, with insufficient training technology and infrastructure and difficulties in attracting and retaining the high calibre delivery staff necessary for quality training outcomes. With schools and local providers unable to simulate industry standard training environments or provide quality work placements, students in regional and remote areas are missing out on all necessary factors that will heighten their overall employability - they shouldn't just be getting a certificate at the end of it, they should be equipped with the right skills and knowledge to get started on their chosen career path.

## **RESOURCING OF THE PROGRAM**

Some affiliates have reported that their children have experienced compromised choice due to the resourcing of the VETiS program. If we want students to make genuine choices, irrespective of financial barriers, we need adequate funding and an increase in the availability of worthwhile, cost-free options. WACSSO is of the position that no choice should be made based on financial capability and the Department of Education and the Department of Training and Workforce Development should be offering supports to schools to deliver these options.

Another resourcing issue parents have highlighted is that there are some instances where it falls to families to accommodate VET pathway activities. There should be adequate funding and resourcing of VETiS to alleviate the current financial pressure being faced by West Australian families. This should account for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), tools and equipment, prescribed uniform/clothing etc.

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that some out-of-subject-area teaching is taking place in schools – we have affiliated parents concerned that their children are being subject to the same potentially damaging practices in the VETiS program. It is a given that delivery of VETiS must be to high quality so that students can experience high quality results and ultimately increase their employability, as the VETiS program should effectively be skilling our students for the future. Steps like having the trainers in the schools meeting ASQA (Australian Skills Quality Authority) guidelines and having available resources in the schools to meet the industry

standards of the qualification to be or intending to be delivered are important in establishing and delivering to a standard.

Some schools now have to fund VET Coordinators to ensure compliance with the ever-changing arena of VETiS. Fee for service programs are not a viable option as the school then just becomes a broker for the Training organisation, which then charges the school huge fees and leaves it up to the school to recoup the money from the parents.

## **PARTING COMMENTS**

WACSSO sees a potential gap in the Education and Health Standing Committee's inquiry into the delivery of the Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) program; this being the exclusion of the ATAR student perspective. The idea that ATAR students don't do VET is not valid. The failure to include the perspective of all students undertaking the VETiS program only serves to further perpetrate a false dichotomy, when the reality is that VET and ATAR pathways should be flexible enough to work in tandem.

WACSSO is concerned by the reinforcement of the narrative that VET is a lesser pathway – achievement is important at all levels of ability. We see a growing need to credit VETiS students by delivering greater recognition to their qualifications. The connection between VET qualifications and higher education should be designed so that students with VET qualifications are able to confidently leapfrog into higher education pursuits.

We also see the need to continue with affirming feedback that the pathway is a valuable and worthwhile endeavour as an alternative for students to attain their WACE. In fact, many schools are strongly encouraging a course load combination of VET and ATAR for a number of reasons. One being that the combination of VET and ATAR can effectively reduce the pressure of a fulltime load – a challenge many senior school students are confronted with.

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<sup>i</sup> Western Australian Auditor General, Vocational Education and Training for Year 11 and 12 Students in Public Schools, December 2016 (p. 23) Available: [https://audit.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/report2016\\_32-Vets.pdf](https://audit.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/report2016_32-Vets.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC), Vocational Education and Training in Schools April 2016 (p. 13) Available: [http://rreac.des.wa.gov.au/reports/ReportsMinister/PublishingImages/Pages/default/RREAC%20Report%20-%20Vocational%20Education%20and%20Training%20in%20Schools%20\(VETiS\),%20April%202016.PDF](http://rreac.des.wa.gov.au/reports/ReportsMinister/PublishingImages/Pages/default/RREAC%20Report%20-%20Vocational%20Education%20and%20Training%20in%20Schools%20(VETiS),%20April%202016.PDF)

<sup>iii</sup> Australia Education Council, Preparing Secondary Students for Work: A framework for vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students, (Online), Commonwealth of Australia, 2014, page 14. Available: <http://scseec.edu.au/EC-Reports-and-Publications.aspx>

Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC), Vocational Education and Training in Schools April 2016 (p. 13) Available: [http://rreac.des.wa.gov.au/reports/ReportsMinister/PublishingImages/Pages/default/RREAC%20Report%20-%20Vocational%20Education%20and%20Training%20in%20Schools%20\(VETiS\),%20April%202016.PDF](http://rreac.des.wa.gov.au/reports/ReportsMinister/PublishingImages/Pages/default/RREAC%20Report%20-%20Vocational%20Education%20and%20Training%20in%20Schools%20(VETiS),%20April%202016.PDF)

<sup>iv</sup> Department of Training and Workforce Development, Vet Qualifications Register for Secondary Students May 2017 Available: <http://www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/uploads/VETiS-qualifications-register2018.pdf>

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v Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC), Vocational Education and Training in Schools April 2016 (p. 16) Available: [http://rreac.des.wa.gov.au/reports/ReportsMinister/PublishingImages/Pages/default/RREAC%20Report%20-%20Vocational%20Education%20and%20Training%20in%20Schools%20\(VETiS\),%20April%202016.PDF](http://rreac.des.wa.gov.au/reports/ReportsMinister/PublishingImages/Pages/default/RREAC%20Report%20-%20Vocational%20Education%20and%20Training%20in%20Schools%20(VETiS),%20April%202016.PDF)

vi Brotherhood of St Laurence 2017, *Generation stalled: young, underemployed and living precariously in Australia*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Available: [http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/9409/1/BSL\\_Generation\\_stalled\\_young\\_underemployed\\_2017.pdf](http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/9409/1/BSL_Generation_stalled_young_underemployed_2017.pdf)

vii House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training. (2017). Innovation and creativity (p. 69-70). Canberra: PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA. Available: [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024036/toc\\_pdf/Innovationandcreativity.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024036/toc_pdf/Innovationandcreativity.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf)

viii House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training. (2017). Innovation and creativity (p. 46). Canberra: PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA. Available: [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024036/toc\\_pdf/Innovationandcreativity.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024036/toc_pdf/Innovationandcreativity.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf)

ix Camm, R. (2017). Other Ways. *acpet.edu.au*. Available: <http://www.acpet.edu.au/article/11550/other-ways/>

x Peter Collier, Minister for Education (10 May 2016). "EDUCATION — CERTIFICATE II COURSES — SOUTH WEST" (PDF). Parliamentary Debates (Hansard). Western Australia: Legislative Council. p. p2442c-2450a. Available: [http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/7e8725f043fe65f748258010000b6441/\\$FILE/C39%20S1%2020160510%20p2442c-2450a.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/7e8725f043fe65f748258010000b6441/$FILE/C39%20S1%2020160510%20p2442c-2450a.pdf)