

VET in Schools Submission

I have a long history of involvement in VET in Schools from a variety of perspectives. I was first involved in vocational learning in schools as an English teacher at John Forrest Senior High School getting learners who were doing the non-academic senior English program released from school one day per week to do work experience and then integrating that experience into their English curriculum. I then worked with the INSTEP team under Barrie McMahon in the Department of Education to develop a structured workplace program with skills to be assessed in the workplace. I worked with the Curriculum Council to develop the skills framework. I went on to work as a VET Coordinator, coordinated work place learning and started up one of the first school based traineeship programs.

The programs in those years were employment related, delivered through partnerships with industry that were win win and involved a high level of workplace experience that taught real workplace skills.

I have since left the education sector and run an RTO that services schools with delivery and auspice arrangements - so I have seen how VET in Schools has changed over the years.

The difference between VET in Schools then and now is:

- The very strong partnerships with industry have evaporated due to the lack of understanding by schools
- A current focus on a qualification rather than getting employment skills and employment at the end of the program
- Higher levels of regulation that have not resulted in higher quality programs or higher levels of skill development
- Higher costs for program delivery that come about due to the higher levels of regulation

The one thing that has remained constant is the continuing antagonism between the education and training sectors.

How well is the program meeting the needs of schools, students and industry

Schools

VET in Schools programs give schools a practical option for the learners who are not university bound. The programs provide further training and employment options than regular non-vet programs.

Schools have issues with

- meeting the high levels of compliance required for teachers to deliver (Vocational competency and industry currency as well as VET competency)
- timetabling adequate time for practice and especially work placement requirements
- generally, don't see the relevance of partnerships with industry
- The school sector and the teachers within it generally don't value VET and its potential to meet employment outcomes for learners

Students

VET programs are often not significantly different to mainstream schooling and the delivery mode often focuses on knowledge based learning. Students therefore often don't get the advantage of doing the programs.

Schools are generally unable to offer a variety of programs and don't adequately prepare their learners for employment based learning so students are disadvantaged in terms of accessing training in their chosen career area.

Many schools offer highly engaging relevant programs and the students are motivated and engaged. They gain skills and experiences that lead to employment and the development of maturity in the learners. This occurs when the teachers can focus on the delivery of outcomes and pay less heed to the areas of compliance that currently cause so much anxiety.

There are starting to be more of these in the schools we are currently working with.

Challenges in regional and remote areas

Regional and remote areas have problems with accessing employment for their populations and similarly have problems offering a range of vocational learning. Similarly, they have problems offering a full range of any educational programs. With innovative and creative teachers and trainers these issues can be overcome. The online learning environment (soon to integrate virtual reality) makes many things possible. We need to engage in some creative thinking to develop some options. In my previous years as an Enterprise and Vocational Education coordinator some of the remote schools had amazing projects that engaged the learners, contributed to the community and enhanced their skill development. One of those that I remember was a travelling disco using a bus that visited several of the schools. Vet competencies could easily be mapped to these types of projects.

At Skills Strategies International, we currently auspice and deliver a range of options to several regional areas. We have worked with schools to be creative and develop community projects such as community gardens.

Registration and ongoing monitoring of training organisations

VET in Schools is currently offered with the school as an RTO or in partnership with an outside RTO. The school as an RTO is I believe an effective model if it is adequately resourced by the administration. It means that a VET Coordinator works with the staff to ensure compliance is maintained and that exceptional delivery occurs. It works well if the principal and administration are on board and believe in VET in Schools as a educational model.

Administration buy in is just as important in a successful partnership model. The partnership model poses higher risk as other than threatening to withdraw their services (which is in fact highly effective) they have no authority over the school teacher/trainers. The effectiveness of the model is based on the purposeful relationship that is developed between the stakeholders and the collaboration to get the best outcomes. This is problematic for schools if VET isn't valued and problematic for the RTO due to the cost vs the risk. However, over time this can be effective for both parties.

In my early days in the VET sector we spent significant time and resources doing destination surveys and monitoring changes in student behaviour as a result of the programs. This was an effective monitoring device for program quality. I believe it has been replaced by higher levels of regulation.

Regulation and monitoring of school based VET programs is by the RTO and the regulator (TAC or ASQA)

The regulation that is involved in VET in Schools programs for any schools that work with Skills Strategies International include:

- Teachers must complete their TAE qualification. From October 2017, this will include a substantial time in training (6-12 months is the volume of learning recommended but this can be reduced somewhat due to teacher delivery experience. However, the regulations in the VET sector and unpacking training packages are so complex that even teachers cannot expect considerable shortening of the time)
- Teachers must complete the certificate they are expecting to deliver prior to enrolling in the TAE (after October 2017)
- Teachers must demonstrate vocational and industry currency
- Negotiate a training contract with an RTO (once all of the above has been established)
- Develop a learning and assessment plan for the delivery that meets the qualification requirements
- Develop a PD plan to maintain skill levels (including maintaining industry skills). This is recommended to be 20 hours per year
- Attend validation and moderation sessions
- Be available to meet with the RTO to demonstrate the courses are delivered compliantly
- Participate in audits by the RTO and by the regulator

Schools who value the vocational education and have been (doing VET for some time) seem to take this in their stride and have no problems conforming. Those who don't get support seem to struggle.

In general, the high level of regulation in the training sector adds an enormous cost burden to all stakeholders, including schools. And it doesn't necessarily contribute to quality outcomes. We need to find ways to remove the cost burden, maybe considering deregulating delivery and having external assessment. Challenges such as these will become more important with the need for flexibility to respond to the ever-increasing changes in the industry sector. The inflexibility of the bureaucratic organisations doing the decision making and regulation will leave industry looking for other options.

Resourcing of the program

As an RTO working in the VET in Schools space we are aware that some schools have no problems resourcing their programs and others are consistently crying poor and scratching for funds. As an outside organisation one wonders why there is this inconsistency. However there has been a recent escalation which we believe is brought about by the proposed changes to the TAE and the higher levels of regulation and the risk of partnering with an RTO that may be closed down or go into liquidation.

The increasing cost of VET delivery is not restricted to schools. However, in a tight economic environment with competing demands for limited public funds some priorities have to be made. University entrants provide more kudos for schools and funds are often distributed unevenly to

ensure the university bound students get priority. For example, we have heard stories of literacy supports are focussed on the ATAR cohort rather than the needy VET cohort.

The cost of VET delivery has sky rocketed with the increasing burdens of compliance both inside and outside the VET in Schools sector. And there is more to come.

- Teacher training with TAE qualifications is about to take a hike with the new TAE40116
- Teacher vocational and industry competency is nigh on impossible to achieve in the current model.
- The cost of resourcing practice offices and simulated work placements is high. The risks of putting learners in real work placements is an organisational nightmare (and schools have burned supportive employers by putting unsuitable students into the work placements)
- The VET sector requires teachers to engage in ongoing PD linked to their delivery area and this means at least \$500 funding for a relief teacher on top of the cost of the professional learning. In the VET sector, many trainers would pay for their own professional learning to maintain their job, but education has a different culture.

While the sustainability of VET in Schools programs looks bleak at the moment we need to evaluate the positives that can be achieved, particularly in terms of the employment outcomes that WERE achieved in the past.

Our desire for a highly skilled national workforce needs to start early. We need to plan what skills can be learned at school so that new employees can hit the ground running. Our current high youth unemployment would indicate that this isn't happening. For this to happen industry needs to be involved in the program delivery – and schools need to be receptive to that involvement. We did that previously and it worked.

Many of the problems in VET in Schools are flow throughs of problems with the VET Sector. We need to measure some of the outcomes achieved at huge cost – and reflect on ways that those outcomes can be achieved with less cost.