

Ms Janine Marie Freeman MLA

Chairperson

Parliamentary Inquiry into the delivery of the Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) program

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Dear Ms Freeman

My name is Bronwyn Blencowe and I am the Managing Director and owner of VETiS Consulting Services Pty Ltd (VCS). My contact details are listed below.

I wish to provide the following information to your Committee and am happy to speak about any of these issues to your Committee.

I am extremely pleased to see that an inquiry is being undertaken for the VET in Schools Sector and I hope with the aim of improving the schools' situation and funding for this very important aspect of secondary education.

I do, however, find it strange to see yet another inquiry into Vet in Schools so soon after the TAC review in 2014 which was wide reaching and much research conducted by NCVET on VET in Schools.

Having said that, however I am pleased to address each of your statements as per your website and in addition I will provide extra or supplementary information that will be of assistance to your Committee.

In 2016, VCS' completion rate was 85% which is much higher than the average across the state for other RTO's who service schools. The reason for this is that we insist the Teachers who deliver and assess our qualifications are vocationally qualified, maintain industry currency, attend professional development sessions and have completed TAE40110. This is rigorously checked.

VCS also provides to schools at no cost all assessment materials, access to an online learning platform (Podium) at no cost and our teachers are supervised by face to face visits on at least 5 occasions throughout the year. We also conduct validation of students work annually and provide an online student and teacher induction program. Our RTO was quoted as "best practice" by an ASQA auditor in our last monitoring audit. Subsequently we received a 7-year re-registration period without an audit.

Statistics for WA and comparison to VCS Average across the state of WA

There are approximately (2016) 36058 students across Year 8-12 who enrolled in a vocational qualification with a completion rate on average of 57.8% in WA (see table 5.7 image below)

School Curriculum and Standards Authority

Table 5.7 Number of students enrolled in at least one VET qualification (enrolled in at least one UoC) who completed at least one VET qualification.

| School Sector | 2016 | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | Year 8/9 | | Year 10 | | Year 11 | | Year 12 | | Persons | |
| | Enrolled | Completed |
| Government | 104 | 0 | 2173 | 1061 | 13204 | 3804 | 10183 | 9088 | 25664 | 13953 |
| Catholic | 0 | 0 | 985 | 711 | 2426 | 948 | 2428 | 2249 | 5839 | 3908 |
| Independent | 0 | 0 | 664 | 439 | 2159 | 1032 | 1732 | 1523 | 4555 | 2994 |
| Total | 104 | 0 | 3822 | 2211 | 17789 | 5784 | 14343 | 12860 | 36058 | 20855 |

Source: http://www.scsa.wa.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/373212/Table-5.7-VET-Qualification-Enrolments-and-Completions-by-system-sector-2016.PDF

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

In my opinion as a professional educator, the VET in Schools programs (if delivered and assessed correctly and to industry standards) meets the needs of schools, students and industry.

There are a lot of factors that will affect this however and these are listed below.

1. Qualifications and industry experience of the teachers who deliver and assess the programs at school.
2. The effectiveness of the RTO was who "assessed" the teacher for their TAE40110.
3. The capability of the teacher to "facilitate learning" in VET and conduct VET Assessments.
4. The advice and guidance provided to the student and the parent about the VET courses that can be delivered at their school and how these may best fit the student's capability, interests and needs.
5. Funding provided to the school for use in the VET program and funding to better support students with special needs.
6. The professionalism and integrity of the teachers delivering and assessing VET programs.
7. The physical resources available to the school for the VET program
8. Internet capability at the school for the students to access learning materials, research and submit evidence documents.

I will address each of these factors.

1. Qualifications and industry experience of the teachers who deliver and assess the programs at school.

Secondary teachers mostly graduate with a degree in education or arts (some with grad dip in education or arts) and have generally been placed in schools to do “prac” teaching as part of their course. At no stage are they trained in how to deliver a VET qualification and in many cases, have no idea about how to facilitate learning from what I have seen and experienced with a lot of secondary teachers.

If the school is lucky they have a graduate who had a trade previously and is retraining as a teacher, so they have the qualification and industry experience but do not have the TAE40110.

Recommendation:

Modify the teaching degree to include training and assessment in a VET context and include the TAE40116 (new qualification) in the Teaching degree (delivered by a qualified instructor through an RTO) as well as gaining a vocational qualification whilst doing their teaching degree.

If this was to happen, it would save the school a lot of money in terms of RPL for teachers in TAE and vocational qualifications (around \$3500 per teacher, thus saving the State money) and schools would get pre-qualified teachers to deliver VET instead of constantly being hounded by RTO's to be compliant.

2. The effectiveness of the RTO was who “assessed” the teacher for their TAE40110.

Whilst RTO's are constantly audited by TAC and ASQA, shoddy and non-compliant RTO's still get through audits by a variety of means. Some RTO's assessing teachers for RPL have been identified by VCS as “red flags”. This means if the teacher has been assessed by those RTO's we basically do a mini TAE course to upskill the teacher prior to commencing delivery. We do not charge for this as we HAVE TO accept their TAE under the standards. For these teachers, we encourage more PD sessions they are required to attend for this area.

Recommendation:

Tender out to Australia Wide the RPL or Training of Teachers in TAE40116 if recommendation 1 does not get approved. In the tender, I would recommend that the DOE surveys all RTO's who auspice those teachers and get comments on the teacher's performance in TAE related areas. I would also recommend that no RTO who auspices schools be permitted to tender as this is a direct conflict of interest. The DOE would also need a monitoring process of those teachers to assess their performance and knowledge on a regular basis, or compulsory PD sessions each year that all teachers must attend.

3. **Technology in the classroom and the capability of the teacher to “facilitate learning” in VET.**

A teacher is no longer a person who just stands up the front and lectures to students. They have many roles such as a transmitter of information, a facilitator of learning, a resource person, a counsellor and an assessor. They are a person who needs to have high levels of technical skills and how to utilise these skills to improve students learning and motivation. Teachers sometimes need to be dragged into the 21st Century to embrace 21st Century technology.

We often hear horror stories from teachers that they can't use internet or Microsoft Office software, they don't know how to clear their inboxes when they are full thus impinging on communication with students, parents and the RTOs, let alone using technology to support learning for the students.

Teachers are trained through their Degree in Education to a trainer of content knowledge (therefore, they specialise in one area) as opposed to a “facilitator” of learning. A facilitator is a process expert who leads discussions, helps students learning from their own experiences and shared information and shows students how to learn.

Teachers are being left behind by students and industry trainers in both technology and facilitation skills. They are not preparing students for the workforce nor surviving in a technological world.

Some teachers believe that all they need to do is to give the students the assessments and let them get on with it, rather than facilitate their learning and then assess them.

Some teachers prefer RTO's assessments that are “easy” – i.e. just tick and flick so it makes their job easier. The outcome of this is a poorly trained graduate who is unemployable and the RTO getting a bad name as well as the RTO being non-compliant.

Classrooms need to change; teacher's skills need to be radically updated and technological tools need to be allowed to be used in schools e.g. You Tube, I-Phones in class, Internet Links and increasing the number of students permitted to use internet at the same time in the school (not just one link between 3 or 4).

Speed of the internet has increased dramatically and 100up and 100 down is now available (VCS has this in place), yet a lot of metropolitan schools still don't have the infrastructure for internet let alone fast internet connections. In some cases, Regional and Rural schools have better internet connections.

Recommendation:

1. The Degree in Education needs to be revamped to consider skills such as Facilitation Techniques, Strategies for learning e.g. Constructivist theory and teachers need to be mentored and assessed in these skills by high quality training and industry practitioners.
2. Remove restrictions in all schools and allow students access to You Tube, internet links in Assessment Books.
3. More computers in the classroom for students to access. One school who teaches Business does not have access to a computing lab for most time for this course.
4. Restructure/Fund more internet speed and connections so that every child has access during the day at school in the classroom.
5. Remove the restrictions on mail size for Teachers and size of email boxes.
6. Retraining and upskilling teachers in facilitating learning using technology and practitioner skills.

Challenges for regional and remote areas

1. The challenges for schools participating in VET in Schools in rural and regional areas is the lack of funding for teachers to attend Professional Development, teachers gaining their TAE and vocational qualifications, travel and accommodation costs for RTO's to visit face to face rather than skype, email or phone calls; and lack of funds for relief (limited budgets being allocated to VET programs).
2. The other challenge is to get a qualified trainer/assessor to deliver VET in Schools programs in remote locations. (High turnover of staff) especially since teachers are being forced to clear their Long Service Leave.

Recommendation:

1. Increase the funding for teachers in rural and remote regions to participate in PD and Currency opportunities, RPL for their vocational qualification and the Cert IV in TAE course.
2. Increase the funding for the schools to have more visits by the RTO face to face or funding for the teachers to travel to Perth for these visits.
3. Create a retention strategy for teachers in rural and remote areas which could include allowances, more support, better housing, travel back to Perth periodically etc. Perhaps surveying the teachers to see what would interest them to stay in these areas.

Other Challenges Generally

1. In the audit of VET in Schools in 2014 by TAC, it was stated that their “key concerns were that training and assessments had been changed without agreement from the RTO, that quality assurance by RTOs was inadequate, and that teachers had difficulty maintaining vocational currency.”

I disagree with these statements for the following reasons:

- a. Teachers don't have difficulty maintaining vocational currency, in fact most of them are very willing to do this. The issue here is that the schools will not pay for teachers in the majority of cases, to maintain their professional development or vocational currency related to the qualification they are delivering. It may be (from adhoc discussions I have had) that most funding goes to WACE programs and insufficient funds allocated to VET programs.
 - b. Changing of Training and Assessments without the authority of the RTO's. – whilst this does happen, this is caused by a lack of monitoring by the RTO; or a lack of provision of compliant assessments and the teacher wishing to improve these; or possibly poor training of the teacher in TAE so they do not understand the compliance requirements. At VCS, we provide all assessments that are highly compliant and teachers are monitored carefully to ensure these are being used. Some RTO's don't even visit the teachers.
2. **Transient nature of teachers moving from school to school.** With no centralized transfer systems, any longer, teachers seek out the best options for them which may be higher pay rate, less troublesome students or management, closer to home etc. This results in some teachers arriving at schools and on day one being told by the schools they are delivering a VET qualification. They may or may not be qualified to do so. This impacts on compliance for the RTO (if the RTO is willing to accept this risk which VCS is not).
 3. **Another challenge that we find is the constant poor publicity of VET in Schools** usually by TAFE lecturers who purport to be industry. I personally have had experience of this when attending industry skills meetings and TAFE lecturers make unsubstantiated claims and the chairperson seems to accept these as truth! There are many teachers in these programs who are from industry and trade qualified with teaching degrees and provide a top-level program to the students.
 4. **Work placement opportunities** – whilst not all VET courses require work placements we have found that the Careers Officer or Workplace Learning Co-ordinator visit the students on work placement and are not qualified to conduct the on the job assessments as required by the training package. The trained and qualified teachers are not provided with time to visit students to complete the workplace component thus reducing the compliance of that assessment.

Recommendation:

1. Funds allocated to the school should be increased for VET programs and Teachers to gain their requirements for PD, Currency, RPL for vocational qualification and TAE40116 and principals be made accountable for the expenditure to ensure it did go to Vet and not infrastructure or WACE programs. The one line item budget in my opinion does not lend itself to an unbiased allocation.

When you consider the statistics in 2016, 13540 Year 12 students sat ATAR courses and of these only 7032 enrolled into University (this represents 27.6 % of the total student cohort in Year 12 who sat ATAR exams – 25441 Year 12 students). <http://www.tisc.edu.au/static-fixed/statistics/application-offer/2017-02-01-foe-by-state.pdf>

When you consider students, who completed a Certificate II or higher at school there were 13971 in Year 12. This represents 54.9% of all year 12 students.

From these statistics, you can see that Vet in Schools is very successful as compared to ATAR results at 27.6% enrolling at Uni, yet barely receives sufficient funding for teachers to get qualified.

Our estimate of the costs of training a compliant teacher and then the ongoing VET in Schools costs from the RTO per teacher/per class would be approximately \$12500 per teacher per class; plus, any consumables, equipment, textbooks, resources required.

2. Reinstate a centralised system for the recruitment of teachers at least 6 months in advance of the commencement of the academic year so teachers have time to get qualified.
3. Have a marketing campaign about the benefits of VET in Schools programs, the great job mot teachers do and the fabulous work that compliant RTO's put into place to ensure the schools remain compliant. Marketing could include past graduates who gained employment as a result.
4. Work placements by the qualified teacher – allow more time for the teacher who is qualified to assess on the job. This could be achieved by careful scheduling of VET programs to be off the grid and one to two days per week. By providing more hours to the weekly schedule for VET will improve the quality of the graduate's outcomes.

Registration and ongoing monitoring of training organisations

RTO's undergo rigorous schedule of auditing by their Registration Bodies now, it is an easy out for DOE to say that poor VET in Schools performance is because of lack of monitoring of RTO's when this is not the case i.e. lack monitoring. It might surprise the committee to learn that most RTO's are audited annually for a variety of reasons. They may fall into a Strategic Industry audit category, there may have been a complaint against them, they may be on a yearly monitoring schedule because of high risk categories set by the registering bodies. Do not audit RTO's any more than they already are. The Registering bodies have this in hand and there are systems in place if an RTO is not compliant.

Recommendation:

1. Train Schools in how to do due diligence on the RTO they wish to use. VCS has a due diligence checklist we provide to our schools.
2. Train schools in the philosophy that easier is not always better (compliant).

Resourcing of the program

Fees that RTO's set are extremely low and unless you have volume in numbers the program is not viable as a business option. After 15 years, we have just increased our prices to ensure we remain viable. The committee will see many RTO's enter the market with glossy brochures and the same RTO's fall by the wayside because of the high level of compliance requirements for the RTO.

We believe the resourcing is grossly inadequate for the reasons stated earlier. We have trade training centres valued at millions of dollars funded by the Federal government and are white elephants. If private RTO's were asked before the applications went in they would be more relevant to the needs of the local environment.

Private schools have the luxury of being able to charge parents for any shortfalls in funding but government school parents are not forced to pay fees and the government schools suffer the most as a result.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Bronwyn Blencowe'.

Bronwyn Blencowe
Managing Director
VETiS Consulting Services