

ISA SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE PERCEPTIONS AND STATUS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

DATE MARCH 2023

1. KEY POINTS / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Independent school sector is a key contributor to vocational education and training (VET) through the provision of VET onsite as a registered training organisation (RTO) or through engaging students in external VET courses or school-based apprenticeships.
- Independent schools offer careers advice to students and families. On-going professional development, staffing and resourcing is required to provide the most up to date information.
- Independent schools form key relationships with industry and business to ensure robust and engaging VET courses and apprenticeships can be offered. However as there is no coordinated and comprehensive approach amongst school sectors, government and industry, developing these relationships at an individual Independent school level takes significant time and resourcing.
- VET is increasingly becoming a focal point in education for Independent school senior students, providing not only transition into apprenticeships and further education and training, but also as a pathway to university entry through alternate entry programs and directly into employment.
- To improve the status and perception of VET, the focus on ATAR as the only credible senior schooling option needs to change so that students can take advantage of the many opportunities that VET school pathways can provide.¹

2. ABOUT ISA

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) is the national peak body representing the Independent school sector. It comprises the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs). Through these Associations, ISA represents more than 1,200 schools and 688,000 students, accounting for 17 per cent of Australian school enrolments.

Independent schools are a diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. The latest available data shows that one in six Australian school students attends an Independent school with more than one in five secondary students attending an Independent school.

Independent schools cater for a range of communities with many students educated in regional and remote locations and in settings which are distinctive to the Independent sector, such as boarding

¹ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, "Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training."

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schools and Special Assistance Schools. Independent schools offer a range of educational experiences and services that are not readily available from other providers.

Independent schools make a valuable contribution to education in Australia. They are long-established partners in Australia's education system, alongside government and Catholic schools, contributing to society and the learning and wellbeing of Australian children.

Independent schools are committed to playing their part in improving educational opportunities for young Australians and contributing to a robust and successful national schooling system.

Independent schools include:

- Schools affiliated with Christian denominations for example, Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Uniting Church, Quaker and Seventh Day Adventist schools
- Non-denominational Christian schools
- Islamic schools
- Jewish schools
- Montessori schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- Schools constituted under specific Acts of Parliament, such as grammar schools in some states
- Community schools
- Indigenous community schools
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities
- Schools that cater for students at severe educational risk due to a range of social/emotional/behavioural and other factors.

Most Independent schools are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, some Independent schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, for example Lutheran schools. Systemic schools account for 20 per cent of schools in the Independent sector. Four out of five schools in the sector are autonomous non-systemic schools.

3. ABOUT THIS SUBMISSION

ISA has prepared this submission in response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training (VET), and Commonwealth supported information on VET available to students, and how they impact:

- education and training choices of students, particularly those who lack the necessary foundation skills, or experience other disadvantage
- employer views and practices in relation to engagement with VET.

ISA consulted with the state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs) in preparing this submission.

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4. INTRODUCTION

ISA welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Inquiry into the perceptions and status of VET and to highlight the crucial role that the Independent school sector plays in VET, career advice and upskilling young people for future employment.

In the Independent school sector, VET is seen in many, but not all contexts, as a highly valued educational opportunity for young people to learn important knowledge and skills and have an opportunity to develop employment-based skills and gain certification.

VET is also increasingly becoming a focal point for senior students, providing not only transition into apprenticeships and further education and training, but also as entry into university through alternate entry programs or directly into employment.

AISs and individual Independent schools build ongoing strategic partnerships and relationships with industry and local businesses to link students to future employment opportunities and on the job training through RTO providers, whether these are school RTOs, AIS RTOs or external RTOs.

AISs also support Independent schools with professional development for careers advice and share career and VET related resources with schools, providing advice on available funding initiatives such as the Gateway to Industry Schools Programs (GISP), a state funded program providing Queensland schools with the opportunity to engage with industry through expos, work opportunities, and employers visiting schools.

ISA represents the Independent school sector on national issues, working closely with AISs to understand opportunities and challenges regarding VET, careers advice, funding, student training costs, staff skills accreditation and information regarding ongoing and new initiatives across states and territories.

5. INFORMATION AVAILABLE ABOUT VET AND OTHER PATHWAYS

All student and parents should have access to current and professional career guidance at school however the Independent school sector is extremely diverse and schools vary in their ability to provide dedicated career guidance practitioners and/or a VET coordinator. Many Independent schools have only one staff member who manages both roles and some schools do not have the resources for either role. Therefore, the amount of information students receive on VET qualifications and pathways will differ across schools.

In order for students to receive comprehensive advice, school career guidance practitioners and counsellors must have a sound understanding of the labour market and a thorough understanding of training, study and employment options available.

Careers advisers in schools require ongoing professional development to provide up to date advice to students regarding employment trends, workforce demands, emerging occupations and career opportunities. Students also require evidence-based information to make informed decisions about senior schooling choices and post school decisions relating to further study or employment.

There is an abundance of information available to students, published by state, territory and Commonwealth governments, however knowing where and how to find reliable and up to date information can present challenges for students, parents and schools due to the large number of

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available websites and resources and the lack of a central, authoritative repository. The frequency of updates to information means that keeping abreast of changes can be quite challenging and highlights the necessity to have well resourced, experienced staff in schools to navigate this for students and families.

Students receive advice from a wide range of sources including both formal and informal advice provided by career guidance practitioners, teachers, parents and carers, family, friends, employers, and student recruitment officers working in tertiary institutions. Students also see and hear a range of information presented through media and a variety of other experiences, e.g., work placements, industry tasters and tours, tertiary talks and tours, simulations, etc.

The range of information available can be overwhelming and confusing, particularly to students, and parents and carers. There is both subtle and explicit messaging from an array of sources, including parents and schools, which may encourage students to view a university pathway as the ideal, with other study choices seen as second best. This is not in the best interests of all students nor in the best interests of the nation.

The organisation [Year13](#) has conducted research which highlights the value of current, up-to-date, careers advice. The research reflects data sourced from over 4,000 students from across Australia indicating that 48% of students get their career advice from parents, 17% from siblings and 23% from careers advisers. While 66% of parents said they had a well-rounded understanding of university, only 16% said they had an understanding of VET. This may be a contributing factor in the smaller proportion of students who consider VET pathways and apprenticeships.

5.1 STATE OVERVIEWS

The diversity of the Independent school sector is also reflected in the delivery of VET in schools (VETiS), which varies considerably across states and territories. For this reason, this submission includes not only a national response, but also provides information specific to each state and territory to highlight the complexity and the broad range of delivery of VETiS.

The AISs in each state and territory play a significant role in supporting schools that deliver VETiS or access VET through external training providers. This section highlights some of the initiatives and supports available to inform students and their families about Career Education, VET and future pathways.

5.1.1 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) provides regular meetings for VET Coordinators and career guidance practitioners which include presentations from industry representatives, training providers, career education leaders and agencies, as well as relevant WA government departments. These meetings provide WA Independent schools with the most current information on VET courses, pathways and employment opportunities.

AISWA also organises an annual Training Providers Expo for providers currently delivering to schools or who are interested in working with schools. They also invite universities to this event to showcase their alternative pathways.

AISWA disseminates important information to schools such as the WA Department of Training and Workforce Development's website ([DTWD VET for Secondary Students](#)) which has a dedicated section for schools. This includes valuable information on the funded programs available to school students and a useful guide to managing School Based Traineeships and Apprenticeships.

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5.1.2 TASMANIA

Tasmanian Independent schools have responded positively to recent policy changes supporting more informed school-to-work transition and raising career awareness. The Tasmanian Government's *Years 9-12 Project* has created a vision for VET that "By 2030, all learners in Years 9 to 12 will have access to high quality personalised, customised and localised vocational learning and VET opportunities to support their career and life aspirations."

A strong focus on VET in Tasmanian schools and general vocational learning including career education has resulted in:

- a greater focus on VET that aligns with Tasmanian workforce needs
- ensuring school-based training meets national training standards with a particular focus on work placement
- improved and informed pathway planning for students through years 9-12
- a renewed senior secondary curriculum that reflects contemporary workforce knowledge and skills
- access to contemporary career information that supports greater knowledge about workforce requirements
- a focus on education and industry partnerships that support school students attaining VET qualifications which are valid and ensure appropriate performance to meet industry expectations: Certificate I and II VET qualifications for years 11 and 12, Units of Competence (not full qualifications) at years 9 and 10
- flexibility to meet changing skills needs in particular industries allowing Certificate III qualifications in approved circumstances
- greater promotion to schools and students of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships for Certificate III qualifications in high demand skills areas.

5.1.3 NEW SOUTH WALES

There is growing evidence of a positive change in the perception of VET in NSW Independent schools which may be due to the increase in the availability of information to Independent school students and increased uptake of VETiS.

Informed career advice and/or exposure to employment pathways commencing in primary school and lower secondary school is important and effective, as is the opportunity for students to engage in real-life work experience.

Within the NSW Independent school sector there has been a consistent increase in the number of Independent schools joining the AISNSW Registered Training Organisation (RTO) in order to deliver more VETiS. In 2015, there were 85 Independent schools delivering programs through the AISNSW RTO and in 2023 there are 125 Independent schools, an increase of almost 50 per cent. Similarly, the number of students undertaking VET in NSW Independent schools has grown over 70 per cent from 2,003 to over 3,500 in that same period.

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Since 2015, the number of students in NSW independent schools participating in School-Based Apprenticeship or Traineeship (SBAT) has also increased. In 2022, there were 520 NSW Independent school students in Year 11-12 engaged in a SBAT.

NSW Independent schools aim to meet the diverse learning needs of their students and for many schools this has resulted in a greater amount of information being available and a broader curriculum being offered including the following programs.

- The NSW Department of Education [RIEP program](#) (Regional Industry Education Program) promotes career related activities for students in NSW, available to both government and non-government schools.
- The [NSW Careers Advisers Association](#) is a well-regarded organisation and offers careers related information and opportunities to NSW Independent schools through its individual and organisational membership.
- Students studying VET engage in work placements and NSW schools are well supported by local Work Place Service Providers (cross-sectoral program across NSW schools).

5.1.4 QUEENSLAND

In Queensland Independent schools there is a growing awareness of the value and integrity of vocational programs in schools across influencers and decision-makers such as school leaders and parents. There are more professional development opportunities and more support for career guidance practitioners to expand their knowledge of vocational pathways.

Career guidance and information made available to Queensland Independent school students is mostly made available through the following organisations:

- Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ)
- Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT)
- Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA).

To support schools in navigating the amount of information available, ISQ has a dedicated Education Services Advisor (ESA) for vocational education, skills and training providing guidance and relevant details to Independent schools regarding:

- professional learning opportunities provided by ISQ and external organisations
- the submission of applications for VET activity, work experience, structured work placement data and school-based apprenticeship funding
- the latest VET sector news including regulatory updates from ASQA and the Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority (QCAA), changes to legislation, Commonwealth and state funding opportunities, program initiatives, professional learning and training package updates
- access to regular one-to-one support to member schools to inform and advise school VET practitioners in a range of areas such as VET tasks, training products and how they align to the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE), delivery and assessment.

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ISQ also provides a dedicated Member Hub for VET, accessible to all ISQ member schools. This Hub comprises resources, forms and guidance materials to enable schools access to the latest information and processes for the implementation and operational delivery of VET programs in schools.

In addition to the above, ISQ funds two accredited training programs to enable the provision of support, information, guidance and valid training opportunities for students on vocational pathways.

- Training and Assessment Education (TAE) Certificate IV to qualify schoolteachers so that they may deliver vocational programs in school as well as their curriculum subjects.
- Certificate IV in Career Development to qualify career guidance practitioners and expand their awareness of VET pathways. The program established between ISQ and the assigned RTO specifically includes career education electives to support vocational students.

DESBT provides information to Independent schools by holding regular network forum events across the regions including stakeholders such as:

- Department of Education (DoE), providing information supporting work experience opportunities, insurance and processes
- Sector representatives including ISQ providing information regarding VET practices, professional learning, application processes and guidance to support VET Coordinators, RTO managers and career guidance practitioners
- Australian Apprenticeship Network Providers, providing information regarding school-based apprenticeships and traineeships opportunities and processes.

Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority (QCAA) and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) provide the latest regulatory updates for school RTOs and information pertaining to the achievement of the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) through VET pathways. QCAA has a dedicated school portal with areas focused entirely on VET, providing information about specific qualifications which are current on the [National Register of VET](#), the required amount of training and the QCE credits allocated with respect to each of those training products.

5.2 COMMONWEALTH FUNDED INFORMATION ABOUT VET

Information disseminated by the Commonwealth should be clear, concise and promote a good understanding of VET and VET outcomes, including a coordinated approach that ensures consistent information between states and territories about the VET sector, including VETiS. Clear pathway options for students that show how VET and university options can intersect, could dispel the VET versus university dichotomy that has long existed in education.

It would also help if the information was tailored to all stakeholders, such as students, parents and carers, career guidance practitioners, VET practitioners, and school leaders. Industry could also support the distribution of industry information relevant to users to help increase their understanding of the range of available options.

The provision of a quality career education program in schools plays a fundamental role in helping to improve information available to students about the range of future pathway options. In recent years, there have been various reviews into career education, such as the Commonwealth government's 'Future Ready: A student focused National Career Education Strategy' [Future Ready -](#)

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[Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government \(dewr.gov.au\)](http://dewr.gov.au) and a recognition that career education needs to be strengthened in schools.

For the VET sector to be better understood and promoted, career education in schools needs to be highly valued, resourced and quality training provided. The Commonwealth government could investigate this further to ensure that future resourcing of trained career guidance practitioners is available for secondary schools.

Meeting the current recommendations around the resourcing for the provision of career education can be a challenge for schools. The Australian Centre for Career Education [Australian Centre for Career Education \(ceav.vic.edu.au\)](http://ceav.vic.edu.au) recommends one full time professional (i.e., qualified with a Graduate Certificate in Career Development or higher) career practitioner for every 450 students plus two associates (with a Cert IV in Career Development), as a team. They also recommend that the professional have teaching qualifications but if not, that they work closely with teachers to deliver career education programs.

Some elements that comprise good practice in career education include:

- ensuring the promotion of learning with unbiased and up to date career and labour market information
- providing beneficial interactions with VET providers
- supporting students to explore all study options available to them, both vocational and academic
- engaging and involving parents and carers, including helping them to understand and value all career and study options.

As school staff often provide informal advice to students, it is essential to increase their knowledge in regard to VET pathways and academic options. In addition, improved specialised training is required for career education practitioners. This could help prevent inaccurate, outdated, and biased information being conveyed to students and the wider school community, and would encourage staff to recognise that all pathways should be valued.

6. PERCEPTIONS AND STATUS OF VET SECTOR

In the Independent school sector, the perceptions of VET vary, and the value placed upon selecting a VET pathway of study is heavily influenced by many factors. However, the perception and status of VET is showing gradual signs of improvement which could, in part, be attributed to recent reviews and investigations into the VET sector. There have been several reports and reviews proposing significant policy changes including the following.

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- *Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training (2020)*² commissioned by the Education Council and undertaken by Professor Peter Shergold AC, that provided 20 recommendations towards a national strategy on VETiS.
- *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System (2019)*³ commissioned by the Australian Government and undertaken by the Honourable Steven Joyce, that included a section on providing clearer pathways for secondary school students through VET programs.
- The NCVER Report, *VET for secondary school students: post-school employment and further training destinations (2020)*⁴ that noted selecting the right VET course and pathway can make a substantial difference to secondary school students looking for direct transition from school into an apprenticeship or full-time ongoing employment.
- The Productivity Commission's report on *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review (2021)*⁵ noted that the reliability and usefulness of career information and advice for school students requires significant improvement and that schools and their advisers often have little experience with VET therefore may favour universities.

However, even with the focus on VET and the many reviews and reports, many educators are frustrated that the on-going singular focus on ATAR necessarily results in a narrow curriculum focus, denying students the opportunities that VET school pathways can provide.⁶

For some years, the University of Melbourne's Assessment Research Centre and other academics have been researching the value of an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) versus other assessment pathways such as VET certification, learner profiles and microcredentials, looking at multiple ways to assess a student's knowledge and skills and application of their skills.⁷

The media focus on publishing school ATAR league tables, comparing the highest achieving students, schools and school sectors, leaves many educators feeling that this influences public perception and reinforces ATAR as the ultimate goal for senior schooling.

² Department of Education, Skills and Employment, "Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training," 2021, <https://www.dese.gov.au/quality-schools-package/resources/looking-future-report-review-senior-secondary-pathways-work-further-education-and-training>.

³ Hon Steven Joyce, "Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System | PM&C," accessed February 27, 2023, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/publications/strengthening-skills-expert-review-australias-vocational-education-and-training-system>.

⁴ Josie Misko et al., *VET for Secondary School Students: Insights and Outcomes*, 2021.

⁵ Productivity Commission, "National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review Study Report," January 21, 2021, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/skills-workforce-agreement/report>.

⁶ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, "Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training."

⁷ Enterprise Professor Sandra Milligan Melbourne University of, "An Alternative to ATAR," Pursuit, October 29, 2019, <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/an-alternative-to-atar>.

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As a result, many families and students believe that the only possible pathway to enter university study is to gain an ATAR. The push for ATAR-based courses also impacts school-based decisions regarding what courses to offer, in order to meet the demands of their community.

Yet despite this public perception, ATAR alone is not the basis on which most students gain entry to university. Many students are accepted based on VET qualifications and training, workplace experience, early entry, mature-age entry or alternative selection processes.⁸

Anecdotal evidence indicates that there has been an overall positive shift in school communities in relation to the status of VET, however, other factors, such as the value placed on VET as a pathway, the resourcing available to support VET and career guidance in schools, and the skills and experience of individual VET coordinators, can have an impact at a local level. Having a flexible timetable and the teachers needed to support the inclusion of VET in a student's program can present challenges in schools.

However, the perception amongst certain parts of the community that VET has a lower status/value than a university pathway remains. In this context, educating both students and parents that the two do not have to be mutually exclusive, ensuring that students are guided into the correct VET course, and overcoming the stereotype that VET is only for disengaged or struggling students, are essential.

Some government initiatives steer students into programs that link with areas of skills shortage. Limiting the variety of courses that students can access in this way may undermine the overall value that VET can have for a young person and their exploration of potential future pathways and could, in fact, create skill shortages in other areas.

Employer engagement varies depending on the industry and this may limit student opportunities for work experience and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. Feedback from AISs indicates that some industries and employers are very accommodating, whilst others make it difficult for Independent schools and students to engage in work programs, resulting in students pursuing other opportunities.

6.1 EXTERNAL RTOS

Higher certificate levels that are not government funded are provided at considerable cost to parents. Feedback received by ISA noted that in addition to these fees, some RTOs will schedule program delivery and assessment across a single line of the traditional timetabled curriculum resulting in no more than 220 hours of supervised training, irrespective of whether the program is a Certificate II qualification or a Diploma in order to maximise financial returns.

As a result of this form of delivery, there can be a perception that 'VET is easy' and qualifications such as Diplomas (AQF level 5) are not difficult to obtain. However, VET programs, especially at Certificate III level and above, do have a high level of rigour and challenge around the acquisition of skills and the independent application of required industry knowledge. To achieve this rigour, activities must be assessed across a range of different industry relevant contexts and over a

⁸ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, "Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior 13Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training."

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sufficient period of time in accordance with training package requirements, industry expectations at the entry level and the identified ability of the student cohort.

As some RTOs are limiting the amount of training provided to school students, the applicable assessment activities may not be as rigorous. This is a key contributing factor to the view held by industry that school students are leaving school with the paper credential but not the required skills, contributing to the current skills gaps. A review of systems, delivery and assessment practices and greater RTO accountability could improve the quality of professional, trade-based workforces.

Another issue noted by AISs is that in some instances, especially across regional, rural and remote Independent schools, trainers and assessors supplied by external providers do not have the experience of providing adult learning to senior secondary school students and often deliver and assess using the same pedagogical approaches as they would to mature adults.

6.2 INDUSTRY

As noted above, many industries have reported that often students emerge from school with the credential but not the actual skills. In addition to the RTO issues outlined above, this may also be partly attributed to schools incorrectly placing 'underachieving' students in vocational education and training programs. This perception that VET is still primarily a pathway for those with low levels of literacy, numeracy, or who are disengaged from learning to achieve an ATAR may be affecting the perception and status of VET more broadly.

Whilst vocational programs at levels 1 and 2 may provide opportunities for under achieving students to acquire lower-level skills in specific subject areas, identified learning needs must be addressed through bespoke programs which are focused on supporting these specific areas.

6.3 STATE AND TERRITORY AIS PERSPECTIVES

The following section provides views from some state Associations of Independent Schools about the perception of VET.

6.3.1 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In 2014, The School Curriculum and Standards Authority raised the perception of VET by making it mandatory for non-ATAR students to complete a minimum Certificate II in order to achieve their Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). However, WACE criteria changed again in 2019 and VET was no longer a mandatory option for non-ATAR students. As a result, in 2020 there was a significant increase in applications for funded courses offered by TAFE. This outcome was a positive result for the standard of VET delivered to school students as there were more students selecting qualifications that they were interested in and that related to the state priority occupations list (SPOL). However, whilst this outcome was a good result for the status of VET delivered to secondary students (VETDSS), it led to TAFE being oversubscribed and many students missing out on their course selection.

In 2022, DTWD addressed this increase in applications by providing additional places in their VETDSS program. In addition to a significant increase in course options, they also permitted Year 10 students to access these funded courses for the first time. Another new initiative was to include skill sets in the VETDSS program.

Due to changing programs, initiatives and options, perceptions of VET are also continually changing.

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6.3.2 TASMANIA

There has been a significant shift toward more positive attitudes on VETiS programs amongst Tasmanian independent schools largely as a result of the Years 9-12 Project being a cross-sectoral initiative with strong partnership qualities established and maintained by Government, Catholic and Independent school sectors.

Most Independent Tasmanian schools with a year 9-12 presence have established VET programs or are planning to incorporate these in the next couple of years.

There has been particular interest among smaller Independent schools in developing supportive strategies for school-to-work and viewing Australian School-based Apprenticeships (ASbAs) as a useful way to engage with VET in a practical way while supporting better post-school outcomes including post-year 10 transitions to future work and training.

Many of the national Trade Training Centres established from 2007 work closely with both industry and Independent schools to deliver high-demand skills through their VET programs particularly in construction, automotive, hospitality and horticulture and aquaculture.

There are still challenges, as even amongst the most committed Independent schools there are perceived or actual barriers. The following is a sample of perceptions from some Tasmanian Independent schools:

- VETiS programs are relatively complex requiring partnerships with employers and RTOs which for many Independent schools are new experiences.
- Running VETiS programs based on individual student interest is expensive, disruptive to school timetables and operations and is hard on teacher resources like professional time and compliance demands.
- VETiS is most appropriate for students who are not embarking on an ATAR-generating program. Only a couple of Tasmanian Independent schools demonstrate a major commitment to VET, where *all* students are expected to complete a VET program.
- Recruiting and upskilling suitable VET teachers is expensive. VET teachers require a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment which can cost between \$1500 and \$4000.
- Work placements for VETiS programs can be difficult to secure although many Independent schools use their existing parent and business networks to secure such placements.

Since there is no dedicated RTO for Independent schools in Tasmania, there is a greater tendency to use on-line RTO services with dedicated VETiS providers like IVET (<https://www.ivetinstitute.com.au/>).

As an outcome of post-COVID skills shortages there has been some sizeable shifts in the attitude of Tasmanian employers across all industry sectors to school-based VET demonstrated through:

- more pro-active engagement by industry with schools promoting training pathways into their respective industries. In Tasmania, mining, forestry, aquaculture, hospitality, tourism and construction industries now actively seek opportunities to engage with students through VET taster programs, industry expos, site visits and joint educational activities
- active promotion to schools of ASbAs for industries seeking to rebuild their workforce

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- ongoing collaboration between schools and industry to promote VET programs and provide work placement opportunities, particularly through industry associations such as the Master Builders Association that has a wide-ranging program working with schools to recruit apprentices in the construction industry.

New and emerging skills required in renewable energy and drone pilot aviation has seen industry engage with schools, provide on-site training and future employment and career opportunities.

The Tasmanian Department of Education is directly engaging with industry to determine how VETiS and ASbA programs can align with industry skills needs, and looking at the appropriate level of qualifications that can be delivered by schools. There is also a more pro-active stance by TasTAFE in supporting better industry training pathways and working more directly with schools to nurture school-to-TAFE programs. This sends a clear message that school-based training is legitimate and is endorsed by the peak industry training body.

Tasmanian Independent schools that perceive the value of running a VETiS program generally have:

- a school commitment to ensuring all students have access to a VET program, will participate in, and in many cases complete, a VET qualification
- school leadership that actively promotes VET programs to students, parents, and the local community
- a capacity to engage with local business and industry in effective partnerships where students are provided access to work placements and to ASbAs
- qualified VET personnel on campus particularly those responsible for coordinating and delivering VET programs that can work constructively with RTOs
- resourcing of VET is treated no differently to that allocated to more traditional subject areas
- flexible approaches to innovative VET program delivery with some schools even creating school-based enterprises which employ trainees and apprentices from the student population.

6.3.3 NEW SOUTH WALES

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) recently announced the removal of subject categories for the NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC) and the subsequent impacts for calculation of the ATAR. VET subjects were previously identified as category B subjects and students could only have one category B subject calculated in their ATAR. The removal of 'categories' means that students can study more than one VET subject and still have it calculated in their ATAR. This will apply for the first time in the 2025 HSC and significantly improve the status of VETiS in NSW.

The growing prominence of awards and competitions is also raising the profile of VET. AISNSW is actively seeking an increased presence of Independent schools, students and staff in events such as WorldSkills and the NSW State Training Awards. The intention is to raise the profile of VET in the NSW Independent school sector and highlight the achievements and opportunities that are possible through a VET pathway.

6.3.4 VICTORIA

In Victoria, the perceptions and status of the VET sector have affected the level of employer engagement and recruitment and retention of the VET educator workforce. The VET sector has faced funding cuts over the years which has meant many reduced programs and resources. Anecdotally,

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many VET educators feel undervalued and that they are expected “to do more with less” in an area that has increased the administrative and compliance load. With limited resources, the VET sector may be constrained in its ability for Independent schools and industry to engage at an optimal level.

The recent Victorian Firth review [vocational-applied-learning-pathways-report.pdf](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/vocational-applied-learning-pathways-report.pdf) ([education.vic.gov.au](https://www.education.vic.gov.au)) made several recommendations in relation to the VET sector, including providing students with more exposure to applied learning and exploration of vocational areas in the middle secondary years to foster a greater understanding of career pathways and help build the career aspirations of students.

It is important that schools recognise that VET delivered to secondary students (VDSS) does not equate to career education. In many schools VDSS coordination is bundled into the career practitioner’s position description. This often precludes the career practitioner from being able to implement good practice in career education, let alone VDSS.

Parents and carers are influential when it comes to student enrolment choices therefore programs such as the Victorian Department of Education’s Engaging Parents in Career Conversations (EpiCC), and a program developed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence in 2003, Parents as Career Transition Support (PACTs) can improve the status of VET. Though PACTs requires a refresh, it has been taken up and adapted by others over the years and EpiCC is still available on the Department’s website. Both programs are designed to provide parents and carers with current information and resources about careers and pathways. EpiCC relies on the career practitioner to deliver it in the school, however, due to insufficient time in the timetable and limited school resources, this is often not possible, despite many career practitioners recognising they need to involve parents and carers more.

6.3.5 QUEENSLAND

VET in Queensland Independent schools has a strong profile with 175 Independent schools offering VET qualifications to students through TAFE Queensland, private RTOs, school RTOs and / or school-based traineeships or apprenticeships (SATs). In 2022, this represented an increase of 11% in the last two years.

Queensland Independent schools provide a range of VET qualifications: Certificate I, II, III and IV as well as Diploma level qualifications. In 2022 this equated to a total of 312 qualifications being delivered to 22,129 students across years 10 to 12 in Qld Independent schools.

The highest number of students achieve a qualification at Certificate II level. There is, however, a significantly higher number of Certificate III level qualifications being offered for study across years 10 to 12 compared to 2021. This data shows an increase of 24% in Certificate III qualifications being actively delivered and reported on, and a 6% increase in student enrolments at this level.

School-based apprenticeship and traineeship commencements have increased over the past 5 years despite the impacts of the Covid pandemic with a total of 1,143 in 2022.

Negative perceptions of VET may be exacerbated by:

- insufficient advice provided by careers guidance practitioners in schools
- lack of ‘try a trade’ type work experience activities undertaken prior to sign up

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- parents finding willing RTOs and employers ready to engage and sign up their child, irrespective of their suitability and without any career advice
- schools being at the 'back end' of the arrangements, sometimes only being informed once the [Australian Apprenticeship Support Network](#) provider is ready to complete the training contract sign up
- employers being 'disappointed' with the levels of literacy, numeracy, maturity, accountability, responsibility and work ethic shown by some school students.

When considering VET perceptions within Queensland Independent schools, it is important to consider the diversity of the sector and the wide range of differing student cohorts. Some schools are strongly ATAR focused with the majority of students primed for university inclusion. Depending on context, some schools have a dual approach or may promote multiple pathways, valuing each approach and individual student need. However the value placed of vocational pathways is not consistent across Independent schools.

6.4 INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE

Australia's school-based VET system compares well to international comparison, particularly in terms of program delivery and quality of training.

Some examples of national and international efforts where industry drives school-based VET programs include:

- the strong German and Swiss industry ownership of apprenticeship systems which link directly with schools. In Switzerland nearly 65% of senior secondary students are enrolled in an apprenticeship program <https://www.aicgs.org/publication/the-swiss-apprenticeship-system/>
- Komatsu Australia's Apprentice Development System also engages directly with schools through a series of programs like its STEM Punks ([STEM Punks](#)) which both alert students to career opportunities with Komatsu as well as providing an apprenticeship recruitment avenue
- UVAIR's drone pilot program Certificate III in Aviation (Remote Pilot) being delivered to several Independent and government schools in a number of Australian states including Tasmania. The aviation company actively engages with schools because senior secondary students are regarded as top-line recruits into this part of the aviation industry.

7. SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

There are many successful partnerships that support VET programs for Independent school students, however access to supportive partnerships can be complex and there is a wide range of initiatives across states and territories.

7.1 AISS AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

AISS support schools in VET matters, although their capacity to support schools varies across states and territories due to size and other factors.

- AISS network with industry bodies and private RTOs to support schools to maintain relevant training and qualifications and be strategic in their program offerings to students.

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- AISs support schools with VET compliance and quality standards and provide ongoing training or professional development for VET teachers.
- AISs organise VET network meetings, offer webinars, send out VET newsletters, support industry connections with schools and provide practical advice and support to VET Coordinators in schools.
- Some AISs have developed their own Guides to VET for their member schools and organise online or face to face workshops for school staff involved in VET.
- AISs share information about external resources for teachers and students to access, such as the *myfuture* website, Year 13 and the National Careers Institute.
- Some AISs have a dedicated VET consultant to work with Independent schools to promote and support the increase and establishment of school VET programs.
- AISs also support ISA's role in national representation by participating in a policy working groups.
- In NSW, AISNSW is an RTO for over 125 Independent schools offering over 35 VET qualifications.
- In Queensland, ISQ supports over 175 Independent school RTOs engaged in the provision of VET courses or school-based apprenticeships, ensuring rigour and accredited training for educators. ISQ also conducts compliance checks on schools' VET programs.

7.2 INDUSTRY AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Although it can be challenging, it is important that schools liaise with industry when possible to ensure training and qualifications are meeting employers' needs for knowledge, skills and practical application. Many Independent schools form strategic relationships with industry and local businesses to ensure the provision of robust and engaging VET courses and apprenticeships.

The 2020 report, *Looking to the Future*, states that in order for students to understand future work expectations and how to access employment or training opportunities, a more systematic approach for schools to be able to engage with industry and employers is needed.⁹

AIS feedback indicates that successful employment outcomes for students can be enhanced when RTOs help facilitate and coordinate work placements for students enrolled in VET courses, particularly in industries such as Aged Care and Child Care where the qualification demands substantial work placement.

When RTOs coordinate placements, the load is spread between employers and exposes students to a wider variety of organisations and workplaces. Other benefits include the coordination of dates to reduce unintended conflicts with school activities and a more streamlined process for employers, students and the schools supporting them.

⁹ Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

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Success is dependent on successful communication between the RTO, school and employer, working together to support students and prepare them with any training required prior to placements. Ensuring that students are mentored while they are training is also essential.

In the Independent school sector, schools are encouraged to develop their own partnerships with industry, whether that be through their parent body, local sponsors, or local trades and businesses. Establishing these partnerships can be time consuming and are dependent upon the skills and time available to VET Coordinators in schools.

Strong Independent school-industry partnerships frequently display:

- an industry-initiated approach for schools to engage students in VET programs. Eg. The construction industry in Tasmania is engaging in this practice as a method for recruiting future apprentices based on their VETiS exposure,
- a willingness and flexibility by business to recognise the constraints that operate within schools, such as school-timetabling, extra-curricular activities, school holidays, assessment and examinations,
- business recognition of the importance for students to complete senior secondary education and not recruit students partway through a program,
- industry actively promoting the value of VETiS programs to parents, teachers and school-communities,
- industry being willing to work with RTOs and schools to facilitate on-the-job training and assessment, reporting of student achievement and progress and jointly celebrating student success,
- providing non-exploitative work placement where students can acquire the skills recognised in the qualification and are not seen as free or cheap labour undertaking mundane or monotonous tasks, and
- a willingness by schools to engage with industry in supporting VETiS programs by encouraging teachers to visit students on-the-job, participating in joint assessment activities and jointly advocate for and promote programs to stakeholders and school communities.

Some AISs also support schools to liaise with industry. For example, Independent Schools Tasmania has formed strategic relationships with the Mineral Council, Seafood Industry Council, TasTAFE, Beacon Foundation and Wool Industry Australia so they can connect their member schools and support them in setting up school-based apprenticeships.

7.3 STATE AND TERRITORY BASED PARTNER PROGRAMS

Partnerships between schools and businesses, government bodies and other education providers is a central component to the success of VET and related career pathways work. The benefits of successful partnerships between VET providers and employers have been acknowledged in recent Commonwealth and state governments reports and reviews.

Successful partnerships between VET providers, governments, schools and employers are possible when there is sufficient time and resources allocated to developing and maintaining relationships. It takes a concerted effort and dedicated people to build these relationships.

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Below are some examples of state and territory based partnership programs offered around the country to Independent school students, including in regional and remote areas.

7.3.1 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Construction Training Fund (CTF) is a statutory body that collects a 0.2% training levy on all building and construction projects in Western Australia greater than \$20,000. Revenue from the levy is channeled back into the industry with programs that support workforce training, upskilling and career-enhancing opportunities. They have played an active role working with Independent schools in promoting pathways into the construction industry. Each year they run a number of 'Try-A-Trade' programs that are short 1–3-day workshops giving students a taste of different skills and jobs in the industry. They are always well attended by school students.

The CTF also funded the establishment of the Construction Futures Centre. The Construction Futures Centre (CFC) is a career development facility, using AR, VR, simulators and games to give both young people and adults some ideas of what construction is and what careers are available in the industry.

CTF also offer school students a scholarship program to study certificates in Construction.

Other Industries are well represented by their Industry Training Councils. AISWA regularly invites training councils to present at their VET Coordinators Network meetings to share the current job climate and training opportunities within their industries.

In WA, the state's Department of Training and Workforce Development has injected funding to prioritise opportunities for school students to participate in VET courses and VET related activities. The Department of Training and Workforce Development has a service agreement with AISWA to provide funding to AISWA member schools for the support of the delivery of Vocational Education and Training delivered in Independent schools.

Other significant programs that the WA state government has funded that has significantly raised the profile of VET are:

- VET Delivered to Secondary Students (VETDSS) programs -including additional hours being delivered from 2022 : [DTWD VET for Secondary Students](#)
- Year 9 Career Taster Program: <https://www.careertasterportal.jobsandskills.wa.gov.au/>
- the Skills West Careers and Employment Expo: <http://skillswestexpo.com.au/>
- Careers and VET Expo: <https://www.careers-expo.com.au/>.

The 'Bunbury Trade Training Centre' consortium has been highlighted as a best practice model. WA Independent school students can enrol in the trade training centre in a variety of qualifications that provide pathways to employment relevant to the wider Bunbury / Busselton area. What makes this cluster successful is that it is privately run by a separate entity 'South-West VET Link'. Most classes are filled and even oversubscribed.

The Commonwealth funded Industry Training Hubs were set up in 2021 in the areas of Armadale and Wanneroo. These training hubs provide the following services to Independent schools:

- Information sessions from industries and employers in these regions such as 'The Australia Medical Association, Master Plumbers Association (MPA) Skills, Main Roads.

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- Funding for the Graduate Certificate in Career Education.
- Expo for VET providers and Employers in the region.
- Regular information sent through to schools on availability of jobs and school-based traineeships and apprenticeships in those regions.
- Parent webinars to build understanding of VET.

7.3.2 NEW SOUTH WALES

Successful industry partnerships aligned to specific VET course delivery in NSW Independent schools are particularly evident in rural and regional areas. For example:

- Partnerships with local builders and local industry in the trade areas.
- Strong sports-industry partnerships for VET delivery with top tier sports organisations such as Cricket Australia, Netball NSW, Sydney Swans, Sydney Kings, Sydney FC, South Sydney Rabbitohs and others.
- A small number of NSW Independent schools source work placements for their own students, however the overwhelming majority are sourced and coordinated through local Work Placement Service Providers.
- Beyond VET, the [AISNSW Pathways and Partnerships program](#) supports schools in developing [Partnership Frameworks](#) which guide the development of effective and sustainable partnerships with businesses, government bodies and other education providers.
- AISNSW has brokered and nurtured substantial relationships for NSW Independent schools with major organisations such as Collins Aerospace, eHealth at NSW Health, Sydney Science Park, the NSW Rural Doctors Network and others.

The [Waratah Project](#), an apprentice and trainee partnership with Bennelong Energy Services enables participating schools to actively build culturally inclusive and safe post-school pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Through this Project, AISNSW provides support to 35 NSW Independent schools to develop whole school structures that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student academic, wellbeing and post-schooling success and access to apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities.

The Project develops connections between schools and employers that continue throughout the year, and employers regularly contact schools to provide new opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who gain an apprenticeship/traineeship through the Bennelong Cup receive a \$1000 scholarship to assist in the purchasing of study equipment and tools required to succeed and allowing for a smoother transition from schooling into study and employment, along with ongoing support from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors.

AISNSW also holds an annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Leadership event providing Year 9-12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with opportunities to explore and plan their post-school pathways. This annual event connects students and their schools with both

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university and VET pathways as students attend workshops that develop greater understandings of the options, programs and support networks.

In 2022, over 120 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Independent school students from across NSW attended the AISNSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Leadership event, with schools providing positive feedback on increased student confidence in developing and choosing post-school study and employment pathways.

7.3.3 QUEENSLAND

In Queensland, DESBT's initiative to fund organisations such as the Gateway to Industry Schools Providers (GISPs) is proving to be very successful. GISPs' purpose is to initiate programs that connect industry with schools. GISPs fall under the following sector categories: advanced manufacturing; aerospace; agribusiness; building and construction; community services; food, wine and tourism; health; information, communications and technology; minerals and energy; and screen and media.

There has been a significant increase in GISP program participation across Queensland. In 2022 a total of 103 Queensland Independent schools actively participated in these programs, representing more than a 25% increase in participation when compared to 2021.

DESBT provide VET in Schools (VETiS) funding for identified vocational qualifications most commonly at the Certificate II level. From enrolment and completion data issued to ISQ by the QCAA at the end of 2022, the number of qualifications across Queensland Independent schools at the Certificate III level is higher than the number of Certificate II level programs offered.

DESBT provides funding to ISQ to support Independent school-based apprenticeship and traineeship commencements and VET programs in Independent senior secondary schools.

DESBT also fund a number of organisations recognised as Gateway to Industry Schools Providers (GISPs). There are currently 10 GISPs, each providing a range of services and support pertaining to the needs of industry including access to industry representatives, expo events across the state for school students to attend, funding initiatives and professional learning for teaching in these areas.

As part of the [Queensland Workforce Strategy](#), DESBT fund a number of organisations in the [School-2-Work Transitions](#) program. Each of these organisations submitted a bespoke program for consideration, such as fee-free places for Certificate III in Information Technology traineeship, programs to enable the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and provide further support and training for literacy and numeracy.

ISQ has representation on the [Trade to Teach](#) Working Group. For those who hold a trade qualification and want to pursue a teaching career in Industrial Technology and Design (ITD) a Trade to Teach internship pathway is available. However, this opportunity is only for teachers entering state schools and not the Queensland Independent school sector.

7.3.4 VICTORIA

Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks (VicLLENs) are funded by the State Government. LLENs act as a broker to facilitate engagement with employers and work with local communities, including Independent schools and VET providers, to improve the education, training and employment outcomes of young people. This model could be adapted to provide greater support to Independent schools/VET providers in developing relationships with employers and industry.

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The Foundation for Young Australians published a series of reports, including a toolkit to promote School-Industry partnerships and collaboration. Such a toolkit may provide an impetus for partnerships and help Independent schools/VET providers and employers to better understand mutual needs.

7.3.5 SOUTH AUSTRALIA

In South Australia, the Department for Education's VET for Schools Policy approves which programs and qualifications can be delivered in schools. Whilst Independent schools are not bound by this policy and are free to access any programs they wish, the viability of courses outside of those approved by the Department limits offerings.

Despite the government's aim to steer VET students into courses linked to skills shortages, there is a lack of information about these opportunities or meaningful "taster" courses. This means that students (and their parents) may be reluctant to commit to 12–24-month programs in years 11 and 12, or they may disengage from the program because they could not make an informed decision about course content prior to enrolling.

There are a few examples where South Australian Independent schools and RTO's have been proactive in the joint development of meaningful and financially viable "taster" programs for Year 10 students, allowing students to make informed decisions before committing to the larger government subsidised programs.

7.4 DIVERSE MODELS IN THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL SECTOR

Independent schools are a diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. A number of Independent schools have a strong focus on the delivery of VET.

The Australian Industry Trade College (AITC) delivers programs that enables the right amount of training and exposure to industry, not only for students to obtain their qualification, but to learn work ready skills, capabilities and attitudes that employers require. Due to their strong relationships with industry, they are able to place students on school-based apprenticeships and traineeships whilst ensuring they also maintain and achieve a blended program of general and essential subjects.

Another example of diversity in the Independent school sector is the Men of Business Academy (MOB) that provide programs for disadvantaged male youths and supporting health and mental wellbeing. They structure an individualised learning model for each student to not only teach industry qualifications, but also include activities to maintain student engagement. This involves healthy eating, scheduled gym time and group activities, with dedicated social areas and outings that support mental health and well-being.

These examples illustrate how VET can be structured for delivery in schools in a variety of engaging ways that enable students to fulfill their own personalised needs and gain qualifications to enable transition into the world of work and further study. Promoting flexible models of VET delivery could encourage the adoption of VET within more traditional school models of learning.

8. COMMONWEALTH PROGRAMS

Recognising and reducing the barriers to improving VET programs and delivery requires a strategic, nationally coordinated approach encompassing all stakeholders. Without clear delineation between

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Commonwealth and state and territory government responsibilities, the result is often mixed messages and a duplication of information and services.

There are several Commonwealth programs and initiatives that provide important VET information to students, families and schools:

- The National Careers Institute provides links to major information sources around employment and workforce demands ([Home | Jobs and Skills Australia](#)) and careers information through the Explore Your Career portal ([Explore Your Career | Your Career](#)).
- *myfuture* provides an extensive range of online resources to support career exploration and planning, *myfuture* is currently involved in exploring a project to provide virtual work exposure (formerly work experience) for students in association with Education Services Australia (ESA).
- Training.gov.au ([training.gov.au - Home page](#)) provides a comprehensive listing of VET qualifications, Australian Training Package information and RTOs across all industries.
- The Commonwealth government's Skills and Training website at [Skills and Training - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government \(dewr.gov.au\)](#) provides extensive information, including for school students, on VET.

While there is an abundance of support material made available from government agencies, it is often fragmented and /or duplicated. The National Careers Institute (NCI) could potentially lead and broker career information and resources nationally, rationalising the extensive and diverse range of current material available online.

Streamlining of information at the national and state level would be of great value, especially in virtual interactive career exploration and work experience digital resources such as those found on *myfuture* and the Victorian Department of Education's Virtual Industry Careers Experience (VICE) website. Some initiatives occur locally via individual projects. The North West Tasmanian Industry Training Hub has been producing similar high-quality apprenticeship digital resources.

9. BARRIERS TO IMPROVEMENT

The delivery of VET in Independent schools is complex across sectors and jurisdictions. Whilst the perception of VET in Independent schools is changing, ATAR still dominates senior secondary education and remains the predominant factor in university admission procedures with VET often seen as an alternative pathway. There are challenges and barriers which need to be considered to improve VET programs in schools and increase uptake across the Independent school sector.

9.1 ACCESS TO VET

Students facing barriers to access should not be precluded from accessing VET opportunities that are available to other students and it is important to explore creative solutions to enable access.

In rural and regional areas, VET faces significant challenges in terms of student access to, or choice of VET programs due to limited provision, high financial costs, transport and distance.

Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community schools have restricted access to training and work experience due to the distance to the nearest town with the necessary facilities.

Occasionally a regional TAFE may travel to deliver some courses in a bulk delivery model, but it is

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hard for this model to be financially viable given that the cost and low number of students in those schools.

Ways to improve access for students with additional needs, including students with disability, and from low socio-economic backgrounds is also a key consideration to enable as many students as possible to undertake their choice of VET options.

Fee-free places at TAFE can be an attractive incentive for young people, although these places typically do not apply to the non-government school students who access these courses. ISA is strongly of the view that the school sector should not be a determinant of whether or not a student with disadvantage can access VET.

9.2 SCHOOL CAPACITY

There are many factors that Independent schools need to consider before offering VET programs to senior secondary students, either as an RTO in their own right or through external RTOs. For Independent schools wanting to explore VET options, this can be difficult to navigate. It is not easy to integrate VET into senior secondary studies, requiring students to undertake additional VET study, often offsite, and also maintain their regular school studies.

In many Independent schools, the size of the year 10-12 cohort can be quite small. Independent schools seldom have many more than 200-300 students in senior secondary cohorts. In comparison, some government sectors include sector senior secondary colleges with senior student enrolments typically over 1200 students or as systems, government schools have the capacity to cross subsidise the cost of VET delivery across the entire system.

By contrast Independent schools therefore rarely have dedicated, whole VETiS classes taught by an industry-trained and qualified instructor. An alternative model could be to provide students with individual, customized programs with training provided by an external, often online RTO under the direction of a school-based VET teacher-coordinator who has a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

9.3 STAFFING CHALLENGES

A key staffing issue for Independent schools offering VETiS, is that teachers must have accredited VET qualifications as well as teacher registration. The formal qualification to deliver VET requires both current industry experience and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment which is not sufficient for teacher registration. This can affect VET program offerings when staff members leave, affecting student choice, school programs, school infrastructure, costs and resources and staffing arrangements.

Seemingly continuous changes to training packages and VET teacher training upgrades require significant time, effort and financial cost for both RTOs and schools. Ensuring VETiS teachers retain industry currency with the opportunity to return to industry or engage in refresher programs and to engage in moderation and validation exercises involves time out of school and may incur relief teacher costs. These factors have had a detrimental impact on the appeal of VET for some schools and teachers.

VET teachers often become the VETiS coordinator in schools, supervising students undertaking a variety of VET courses, managing school support strategies, coordinating work placements and

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ensuring compliance in line with RTO requirements. This can be a challenging role particularly if they are required to teach in other subject areas.

RTO trainers may find it difficult to move from adult training models to senior secondary school students. Students have different levels of maturity, life experience and understanding to adults, which needs to be considered in the delivery of VET programs to senior students.

In high demand skills areas, particularly in construction, it is difficult to recruit VET teachers since the industry often offers more substantial incentives and, for young teachers in particular, the industry often head-hunts them to return to industry.

In relation to careers advice, as noted earlier there is often inadequate resourcing and funding of career education in schools. In some schools the function of providing careers advice is fulfilled by a school staff member or teacher whose substantive role may not be careers advice, though they are allocated some dedicated time to this task. In schools where this is the case, time allocation varies, as does the experience and expertise of the staff member responsible for careers advice.

9.4 LACK OF WORKPLACE EXPOSURE

Workplace exposure helps students build their understanding of the world of work, make more informed career choices, increase their networks, and helps to build a better understanding of VET and available career pathways.

Workplace exposure is an element of good practice in career education but Independent schools may find it difficult to adequately resource workplace exposure opportunities for students as the administrative requirements related to work placements are cumbersome and time consuming.

A more systematic approach to support more industry-school collaboration and programs for industry-school partnerships at scale would be welcomed by the Independent school sector.

9.5 FUNDING AND COST CONSIDERATIONS

Many Independent schools face major barriers to the delivery of VETiS programs due to the costs associated with accessing RTO services and upskilling teachers to meet VET training requirements, particularly the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

There is also inconsistent funding of VET across school sectors and a lack of equity in student expenses associated with undertaking VET courses. Cost can therefore act as a disincentive for students to study VET in the senior secondary years or as a post-school pathway.

VETiS programs may carry direct and hidden costs over and above what it costs to deliver the Australian Curriculum and more traditional programs. These include:

- staffing qualifications and availability - recruiting and upskilling of VET teachers and co-ordinators, in particular obtaining the required Certificate IV in Training and Assessment which can cost between \$1500 for an online course to \$4000 for a conventional face-to-face program
- the provision of specialist VET resources such as industry standard workshops, childcare and hospitality facilities, including safety equipment, tools of the trade and/or uniforms
- transport costs for students

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- impact on teacher time particularly in relation to planning work placements, negotiating with RTOs, supervising students undertaking online training, and meeting RTO compliance requirements
- impact on school planning including structuring the school timetable to allow for work placement and school-based apprenticeships, resourcing and student selection procedures
- increased administrative workload due to more complex assessment and reporting processes.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

In this submission, ISA has outlined the value of VET in Independent schools, and the perceptions and status of VET compared to ATAR for university pathways in the sector. ISA has also highlighted the significant considerations and challenges of VET delivery in Independent schools, both as RTOSs and through external RTOs, and the importance of industry-school engagement.

ISA recommends the following actions and initiatives to continue which will improve the perceptions and status of VET in the Independent school sector but also more broadly amongst a range of key stakeholders in education.

Funding for students

- Any government funded VET places or other VET opportunities should be made equally accessible for all sector of education, including the non-government school sector.
- To address skills shortages, consideration be given to financial support packages for students in all school sectors undertaking VETiS in relation to in-demand skills areas and consideration to support RTOs and school costs in program delivery.

Partnerships

- ISA supports the implementation of the recommendation in *The Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training* that working relationships between education authorities and industry bodies need to be formalised so that industry engagement and partnerships become a sector-wide feature of secondary schooling.

Workforce

- Further investment in the current VET workforce is required to ensure it is up to date with the needs of industry e.g. programs where VET teachers / trainers spend time in industry.
- Including VET as an elective in the Bachelor of Education rather than requiring teachers to separately undertake the TAE Certificate IV in Training and Assessment would assist in addressing the current shortage of trainers.
- Registered teachers with industry backgrounds and experience should be supported to attain a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment so that VETiS can be expanded and make it easier for those with industry experience to work in the sector.

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Careers advice

- Study programs for school-based career guidance practitioners should be funded to align their awareness of VET pathways alongside academic pathways and how these two can be combined to represent an increasing number of blended student pathway preferences.
- Provide comprehensive and coordinated support to all school sectors to enable greater offerings of VET opportunities and targeted work experience rather than ad-hoc approaches so that students can truly experience the 'world of work'.
- Support the development of more 'try a trade' type activities, enabling learners to 'try before they buy'.

Perceptions and status of VET

- Enhance the use of terms and language used across the vocational education sector to positively influence parents and carers. It must be acknowledged and recognised that vocational education is 'education', and not something simply to encourage learners to become physical workers.
- Provide incentives for decision-makers in schools to encourage VET provision and to promote the value of VET so that it is seen as a valid alternative pathway to ATAR and not as an alternative for under-achieving students.

11. CONCLUSION

Ideally, the delivery of VET in schools should lead to the development of employability skills for school students so they can enter the workforce with credentials, and the necessary skills to work independently, to show an intrinsic level of enthusiasm to engage with the job at hand and to apply a level of accountability across their tasks.

However, although attitudes are changing, lower perceptions of VET versus ATAR persist across schools, RTOs, universities, industry, governments and state and territory education authorities.

There are a range of actions and initiatives that can be taken across governments, industry and education providers that can improve this perception in the community and elsewhere and lead to a greater recognition of the role of VET in skilling Australia's workforce and meeting skills shortages. As noted in this submission, a more comprehensive and coordinated approach towards the provision of VET may better serve future needs.

ISA welcomes the work of this Review and looks forward to any recommendations which will lead to improved education and industry strategies to effectively educate young people and provide them with a range of options and pathways that will be engaging and meet their interests, passions and career choices.