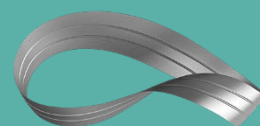

STRATGIC REVIEW AUSTRALIAN APPRENTICESHIP INCENTIVES SYSTEM

ISA SUBMISSION

20 May 2024



INDEPENDENT
SCHOOLS
AUSTRALIA

Acknowledgement of Country

Independent Schools Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and commit to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.



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ABOUT ISA

1

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) is the national peak body for Independent schooling in Australia. ISA represents the sector on national issues and brings the unique needs of Independent schools to the attention of the Australian Government, key stakeholders and the wider Australian community.

Working with the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs), in 2023 ISA represented 716,800 students, over 1,215 Independent schools and a workforce of 122,000 people.

The Independent sector encompasses considerable diversity in size and location of schools, and the types of students enrolled. The latest available data shows that more than one in six Australian school students attends an Independent school. For secondary students, it is over one in five attending an Independent school. Students at Independent schools reflect the full diversity of Australian society – including those who experience one or multiple forms of disadvantage.

Most families with children enrolled in non-government schools are middle-to-low-income earners, increasingly from culturally diverse backgrounds, and residing in outer-suburban and inner-suburban communities. Many of these families are currently facing economic stress and are making substantial sacrifices for their children's education.

As of 2022, more Independent schools charge less than \$1,200 per year than those charging over \$20,000. Some Independent schools charge no fees at all. The majority of Independent schools charged annual fees of less than \$6,000.

Many Independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a specific educational philosophy or interpretation of mainstream education. Many Independent schools have been established by community groups seeking to meet particular needs or to reflect the religious values of a community. Independent Catholic schools are a significant part of the sector, accounting for eight per cent of the Independent sector's enrolments.

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.

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

INTRODUCTION

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ISA prepared this submission in response to the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' (The Department) Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System. ISA consulted with the state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs) in preparing this submission.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is of increasing importance to the future of Australia's workforce. In September 2023, Jobs and Skills Australia's report found that over the year to May 2023, 91 per cent of total employment growth was in occupations that require post-school qualifications, with over half requiring vocational education and training pathways.¹ As highlighted in ISA's recent submission to the Department on the VET Workforce Blueprint Consultation Paper, VET qualifications are highly valued in Independent schools as they provide young people with educational opportunities to learn important knowledge and develop employment-based skills and certification.²

Australian School-based Apprenticeships (ASbAs) are offered in many Independent schools across Australia as a key component of their VET offerings. These high-quality VET programs ensure senior students are prepared for early career roles in their chosen fields, helping to alleviate the national skills shortage. Many Independent schools are Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

VET's importance to Independent schools is growing, as VET programs are increasingly becoming a focal point for senior high school students, with valid pathways such as apprenticeships offering students the opportunity to leave school with well-established fundamental skills for their chosen career. As a result, a sustainable and high-quality school-based VET workforce is of increasing value to the education sector and to meeting future workforce needs.

Note that the term 'apprenticeship' throughout this submission refers to both apprenticeships and traineeships, as their usage differs between states and territories. Similarly, some jurisdictions refer to ASbAs as 'School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships', or 'SBATs'.

¹ [Skills Shortage Quarterly – September 2023 - Jobs and Skills Australia - 2023](#)

² [ISA's submission to the VET Workforce Blueprint Consultation Paper - ISA - 2024](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

3

ISA's submission highlights the successes and challenges facing school-based apprentices in Independent schools, as well as those facing students, families and employers. A stronger and more consistent incentives system, and initiatives to address affordability and access issues, will need to be implemented if the Australian workforce skills shortage is to improve and students are to have equity of access.

To support the sign-up, completion and job retention of students who undertake school-based apprenticeships in Independent schools, Independent Schools Australia recommends that:

1. Increased education and awareness among parents, educators, students, and employers about the benefits and opportunities of ASbAs is prioritised.
2. Access and affordability issues affecting school-based apprenticeships are addressed in a cross-sectoral way to aid in addressing the Australian workforce skills shortages, especially for regional and remote areas.
3. The service and quality standards of the Australian Apprentice Support Network providers are reviewed to ensure consistent, high-quality service provision.
4. Appropriate funding is provided for all school-based apprentices to make these pathways financially viable. Incentive programs should be additive to this funding, serving as an actual incentive rather than a payment to supplement low wages.
5. Funding be made available to promote and support the provision of VET training in remote and regional areas.
6. Support and education for employers through the Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System is increased.
7. A multi-faceted approach is implemented, involving collaboration between government agencies, educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and community organisations to improve access to training opportunities, provide targeted support services, and foster partnerships between schools and local businesses/industry.

SCHOOL-BASED APPRENTICESHIPS IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

4

School-based apprenticeships allow students to gain practical skills and experience while completing their secondary education, providing a pathway to employment and further education.

Data provided by the Association of Independent Schools NSW and Independent Schools Queensland shows constant growth in the number of school-based apprenticeships in Independent schools in these states over the last five years.

The following section highlights the different approaches to apprenticeships in the Independent school sector and provides perspectives from several of the state and territory Associations of Independent Schools.

4.1 ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF NEW SOUTH WALES (AISNSW)

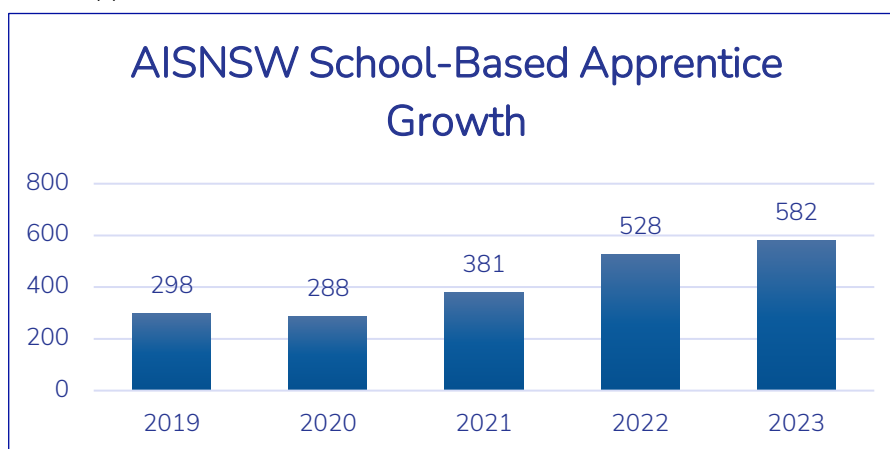
School-based apprenticeships in NSW combine on-the-job training with an employer, with off-the-job training usually provided by TAFE or an RTO. In a standard week, students attend three days of school, one day of training and one day of paid work. Apprenticeships are available to all Year 10, 11 and 12 secondary school students in NSW.

While at school, the school-based apprentice must complete a minimum of 100 days of paid employment. Some trades require more days in the workplace such as automotive (130 days), construction (144 days), plumbing and electrical (180 days).

Student apprentices are enrolled in the relevant course and must complete the required formal training component by the end of Term 3 of the Higher School Certificate (HSC) year. This ensures the student receives appropriate credit for the HSC and has time to prepare for and sit the optional HSC examination (if available).

Through AISNSW’s own RTO, students are also able to undertake an apprenticeship and complete the training component of the course at their school. AISNSW has seen steady growth in the take-up of school-based apprentices over the five-year period to 2023 (Graph 1).

Graph 1: AISNSW Apprentice Growth 2019-2023



4.2 ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY (AISNT)

In Northern Territory Independent schools, the take up of school-based apprenticeships is low, with AISNT reporting that commencements are in decline. There are perceptions from some parents that it is an added burden on students, and several schools report that courses are too administration heavy and costly to offer.

Further challenges are presented by the remoteness of many Independent schools in the Northern Territory, leading to difficulties in engaging qualified trainers and limited course options being made available for interested students.

4.3 INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS QUEENSLAND (ISQ)

The Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) oversees all school-based apprenticeships and traineeships in Queensland. Training contracts are managed and completed by the Australian Apprenticeship Services Network providers and submitted to DESBT.

ISQ offers a Seed Funding incentive to its member schools, providing a token grant per student on application from the school, to assist schools to enable, monitor and support the progress of its students and increase participation in apprenticeships. This is the only funding received by Queensland Independent schools in this regard.

ISQ promotes funding incentives through its VET Focus Area Updates which are sent out to schools every 6-8 weeks and provides continual support and guidance through the ISQ Vocational Education Services Advisor.

In 2023, ISQ schools commenced 1,257 new apprentices:

- Most common areas of take up were:
 - Apprenticeships: Carpentry, Electrotechnology Electrician, Plumbing, Hairdressing and Light Vehicle Mechanical Technology (increased by 6 per cent over 2022).
 - Traineeships: Business, Early Childhood Education & Care, Retail, Hospitality and Agriculture (increased by 12 per cent over 2022).
- The gender split was even:
 - Apprenticeships: 465 males; 458 females
 - Traineeships: 784 males; 792 females
- 88 reported students identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander across 50 schools, an increase of 21 per cent on 2022 commencements.
 - 34 identified as males, with Carpentry or Plumbing as the most popular courses.
 - 54 identified as females, with Health or Early Childhood Education and Care as the most popular courses.
 - 29 of the 50 schools are in a regional, rural or remote area of Queensland.
- 80 reported students are registered with a disability across 52 schools, an increase of 43 per cent on 2022 commencements.
 - 36 identified as males, with Business or Engineering as the most popular choice of courses.
 - 44 identified as females, with Early Childhood Education and Care or Business as the most popular choice of courses.
 - 31 of the 52 schools are in a regional, rural or remote area of Queensland.

4.4 ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA (AISSA)

In South Australian Independent schools, for a school-based apprenticeship to commence it must first be endorsed by the school. School engagement beyond sign-up can vary from school to school although coordinators are encouraged to attend the sign-ups and engage with all parties throughout. If the course is on the government funded list, then an online referral must be completed by the school. This alerts the nominated RTO and initiates an assessment of the student's abilities and learning needs, identifying any supports that may need to be put in place.

Incentives vary from qualification to qualification. In some industries, their industry award mandates that the employer must pay for all training costs, whilst in other industries where this is not mandated, training costs may be paid for by the employer, the apprentice/family, the school or a combination. Depending upon the industry/qualification, incentives may include some of the following:

- Financial support to the employer, paid at intervals throughout the duration of the apprenticeship/traineeship.
- Payroll tax exemption on trades.
- Trade loan support for the apprentice up to the value of approximately \$24,000. This is an interest free loan and, providing the apprenticeship is completed, only 80% of the borrowed amount needs to be paid back. It does however attract CPI which can be a deterrent for some.
- Payments to apprentices for the first 24 months, at 6, 12, 18 and 24 months. Each payment is up to \$625 for school-based apprentices. These payments are only available to apprentices undertaking qualifications in areas of skills shortage.
- Subsidised training through Skills SA –this is only for those qualifications that have been identified as areas of skills shortage.
- The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) provide some additional funding for apprentices in construction.

These incentives vary and are not consistent across qualifications/industries, with the primary focus on areas of skills shortage.

4.5 INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS TASMANIA (IST)

There are currently no school-based apprenticeship incentives specifically for schools in Tasmania, nor is there any funding to support the work of IST to promote and support the uptake of these apprentices.

The Tasmanian Government has established a Youth Jobs Strategy in response to youth (aged 15 to 24) unemployment in January 2024 reaching 15.6 per cent, while adult unemployment by comparison was at a near record low of 4.2 per cent. This policy recognises the place for school-based apprenticeships and school-based VET as part of a wider strategy.

The Department of Education in Tasmania provides a small, dedicated support team to provide information for schools, although the priority is on support for government schools.

The uptake of school-based apprenticeships in Tasmanian Independent schools has been in large part the result of IST's commitment to these courses. IST has funded a part-time VET consultant to promote opportunities that stem from industry initiatives, to develop 'How To' guides for Independent schools, to provide professional learning opportunities for teachers and to engage with schools, parents, students and AASN providers in demystifying school-based apprenticeships.

IST has expanded this role to also provide one-on-one assistance to schools and students on an individual basis to explore school-based apprenticeship options and to work through the procedural requirements to establish these apprenticeships and to deal with hiccups in the system.

4.6 INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA (ISV)

Within Victoria, school-based apprenticeships offer students the option of combining part-time employment, school and training.

School-based apprenticeships are available to secondary school students over 15 years old, enrolled in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), VCE Vocational Major, or the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC).

These apprenticeships lead to a nationally recognised VET qualification. A training plan is developed by the RTO and endorsed by the school. Submission of the school endorsed training plan and a legally binding training contract are required for the apprenticeship to be registered by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

An Apprenticeship Network Provider (ANP) will facilitate the signing and registration of the training contract. The minimum number of employment and training hours for school-based apprentices is 13 hours per week which includes a minimum of 7 hours per week paid employment and 6 hours per week training. This requirement is calculated as an average per four-month period each year.

Many students move on to a full-time contract with their employer after leaving school, while others choose to continue their education and training at an RTO, TAFE or university.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AUSTRALIAN APPRENTICE INCENTIVE SYSTEM

5

For Independent schools, the perceived effectiveness of the Australian Apprentice Incentive System (AAIS) can differ substantially depending on factors such as the geographic location of the school, the proximity of suitable employers, the socio-economic status of parents and the student's career goals.

Common themes of the feedback provided by the Associations of Independent Schools are summarised below.

5.1 ENCOURAGING TAKE-UP OF APPRENTICESHIPS

The feedback in relation to the AAIS's effectiveness at increasing and promoting the commencement of ASbAs varied across the state and territory AISs.

Some AISs report that it is an effective measure to make apprenticeships more appealing for students by assisting with the affordability of undertaking a course. As current incentives are geared towards filling future employment market gaps, they are attractive to those students wishing to pursue careers in skill shortage areas. This also presents a risk, as the financial incentives may sway students to select a course for which they are less well suited, but will be financially easier to manage. This can create long-term issues, such as non-completion or students leaving the industry they trained for.

For those students most interested in a field which is not listed on the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List, the lack of incentives can be a deterrent. It may also signal to students that their desired career is not a priority for the Australian workforce. These factors can drive students towards seeking low-skilled employment that will, in most cases, pay substantially more than an apprenticeship.

The information available to students about apprenticeships in Independent schools can differ significantly. Careers advice is highly dependent on the experience of the school staff delivering the advice, who may have limited VET exposure. For this reason, students may not even be aware of the incentives on offer for particular courses.

A key concern identified by several AISs is the practice of allowing students to sign up for apprenticeships without requiring a job trial first. As incentives are generally only available for students for their first apprenticeship, if they find the job is not what they had anticipated, then students lose out on funding which they otherwise would have been entitled to, had they adequately trialled courses first to find the right fit.

Similarly, there have been instances where employers have abused these incentives. Students have been pressured into signing up for an ASbA for an existing casual workplace role so that the employer can access incentives, rather than for the benefit or need of the student to access additional formal training. This practice often occurs in the retail and fast-food industries. Schools can be pressured into endorsing these ASbAs by students and their families, even though they know that it may not be in the student's best interests and may impact the student's ability to attract funding for other courses.

For the AAIS to increase the take-up of apprenticeships, including those in priority areas, it will need to assess and mitigate the access barriers that some potential apprentices find insurmountable. Section seven of this submission outlines these barriers in more detail.

5.2 ENCOURAGING COMPLETION OF APPRENTICESHIPS

AISs indicated that the AAIS has not been effective in encouraging the completion of ASbAs. Independent schools encourage completion of school-based apprenticeships by providing a strong ongoing support structure to assist students in balancing their schooling with their course and aid in navigating unexpected issues which may arise during their apprenticeship.

While these support structures should work in concert with the AAIS's financial incentives, some AISs commented that the incentives provided for completion were considered too low to factor into a student's decision as to whether they should complete a qualification. Incentive payments would need to be significantly larger to incentivise course completion for students.

For students who do not complete their ASbA, it is often due to:

- Higher pay being available in low skill jobs in retail or hospitality.
- Issues with their employer. This can include a change in employer, generational divide causing communication difficulties, personality/work ethic conflicts or the apprentice not finding the available work engaging.
- Unsuitability for the apprenticeship, as a result of ineffective career counselling or insufficient work experience.
- Travel costs to access training providers.
- Combined pressure with completing school study and apprenticeship requirements.
- Lack of mentoring or support.

Completion incentives for students do not address these issues, and as a result do little to encourage the completion of ASbAs.

The incentives available to employers on completion of an apprenticeship are considered by some to be at odds with the purpose of the apprenticeship. If an apprentice is struggling and is not a good fit for the role, employers having an incentive to finish their training regardless is problematic. If an apprentice is well suited to the field and is working well, employers generally will not need additional incentives to maintain employment through to the apprenticeship's completion, as apprentices are lower cost to employ than an equivalent part-time worker.

5.3 DATA ACCURACY

A complicating factor in assessing the effectiveness of the AAIS in the context of ASbAs in Independent schools is the inconsistencies in available datasets on commencements and completions. In ISA's analysis, we found that the data provided by AISs significantly differed from the publicly available NCVET datasets. The discrepancies here are likely due to variances in definitions, data

collection methodology and categorisation of Independent Catholic schools. For this submission, ISA has primarily relied on the data provided by the AISs.

Further, for ASbAs there are difficulties in analysing the completion rates, as it is challenging to distinguish which completed apprenticeships commenced as ASbAs. This is particularly true for apprenticeships completed over several years on a part-time basis.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AUSTRALIAN APPRENTICESHIP SUPPORT NETWORK

6

Students undertaking ASbAs in Australia have access to the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN). The AASN provides services for both employees and apprentices such as career counselling, opportunities for apprenticeships and traineeships, support with administrative tasks, and connections to government support payments and incentives.

Feedback provided to ISA by the state and territory AISs agreed that services provided by AASN providers are useful, especially when a student is considering or commencing an ASbA. Their feedback was more varied regarding individual providers' ability and capacity to provide ongoing support throughout the apprenticeship.

Though students can initiate contact with their AASN provider as required, school students are much more likely to seek support from their school VET administrator or the RTO first. As AASN providers generally only check in with apprentices a few times a year, the support they provide to schools and students can be limited.

The quality and consistency of an AASN provider's support can vary significantly, which may affect the relationships they are able to build with schools and students.

One AIS raised concerns that the goals of the AASN providers and schools are not always aligned. There are reports of instances where students have signed up for an apprenticeship with their AASN and have left school soon after, rather than completing year 12 and/or undertaking an ASbA. It is important for students to continue with their schooling wherever possible, however AASN's focus on apprenticeship commencements can lead to students being incentivised to leave school for the prospect of short-term gains. Due to a lack of available data, it is unclear how often this occurs in practice.

Increased financial support from state and territory governments would enable AASN providers to increase the number of staff involved in school-based sign-ups to provide continued support and mentoring services, thereby being more effective.

AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESS

7

The primary challenges facing the uptake and completion of ASbAs in Independent schools are affordability and access. Unless these key barriers to entry into a school-based apprenticeship are addressed, many students will not be able to take up the opportunity of undertaking an ASbA. And while the Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System is ‘designed to encourage employers to take on Australian Apprentices and to assist with the cost of training’, these issues remain present across all jurisdictions.³ A holistic solution to affordability and access is required, as these barriers are often intrinsically intertwined.

7.1 AFFORDABILITY

Affordability is a significant barrier for all stages of apprenticeships. It can affect a student’s ability to commence an apprenticeship, to stay in the course to completion, and can even impact job retention following the completion of an apprenticeship. NCVER reports that the primary reason that non-trade apprentices who complete their apprenticeship are actively looking for a new role is because the pay is too low.⁴

Incentives being offered for priority occupations through programs such as the AAIS make sense to drive new apprentices into fields where the skills shortage is having the largest impact. However, in the context of ASbAs, there are mixed views on their effectiveness.

Ideally, ASbAs are encouraged for students where it is their preferred option for their career pathway. Incentives don’t make a substantial difference in these cases, as it is not generally a part of the conversation with students when considering career advice. Though these payments will still benefit apprentices and/or employers, they are often not a determining factor in a student’s decision to commence an ASbA.

Some AISs did note that where the training is subsidised and/or the employer is mandated to pay for the training costs, this does make undertaking a school-based apprenticeship more affordable for students, their families and schools. Combined with other financial supports such as trade support loans and Australian Apprentice Support Loans, this can assist young apprentices to better manage their work expenses, if they meet the eligibility requirements. For those already living independently due to family or social circumstances, this is especially important.

When the training is not subsidised and/or the employer is not willing to pay for the training, Independent schools report that this can make things more challenging for the student apprentice, their family and the school. Depending on the jurisdiction and the field of the apprenticeship, the employer may not be required to pay for training, leading to the apprentice and/or school covering the costs.

Affordability issues continue to be a driver of skills shortages. Apprentices who are currently completing an ASbA, or who commenced their apprenticeship as an ASbA and have now left school, may abandon the apprenticeship for higher paying low-skilled jobs available in the market. Feedback provided to ISA suggested that this is the likely cause of many apprenticeship non-completions. This is supported by NCVER’s recent findings that of apprentices who did not complete their apprenticeship,

³ [Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System Guidelines - DEWR - 2023](#)

⁴ [Apprentice and trainee outcomes 2023 - NCVER - 2024](#)

17.6 per cent did so because the pay was too low, or they were unhappy with the conditions/workplace.⁵

In the context of current cost of living pressures, this tension between students wanting to upskill for their future and needing higher pay in the short term to survive becomes increasingly pronounced.

Issues of affordability extend to schools as well. For schools that are an RTO, VET programs are often operated by staff champions with a minimal budget. Any costs required to be borne by schools to support the delivery of apprenticeships is in competition for funding earmarked for other school initiatives which may have a broader application or affect more students.⁶

All apprenticeships should be appropriately resourced and funded to allow the future workforce to be adequately trained and able to deliver high quality services and trades. Incentive programs to drive potential apprentices to specific fields should be additive to a base level of support provided to all apprentices, regardless of their field of study.

7.2 ACCESS

Even when a student is interested in undertaking an apprenticeship and is eligible for financial incentives to support them to do so, there are additional barriers which may prevent students from commencing and/or completing ASbAs. To enable Independent schools to be well placed to assist in addressing the skills shortage facing the Australian workforce, the following barriers to accessing ASbAs need to be addressed or mitigated:

- Limited access to training providers: Students may find it challenging to locate appropriate or desired opportunities in regional or remote areas due to a lack of access to training providers who deliver apprenticeship programs. Many communities and schools are unable to rely on the economies of scale that are created in population centres, resulting in increased costs of service delivery for remote areas.⁷
- Lack of industry presence: In regional and remote areas there may be fewer industries or companies that provide apprenticeship programs, which limits choice for students to receive training. This barrier increases proportionally with a student's distance from a major population centre.
- Cultural and socioeconomic factors: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may face additional barriers related to cultural factors, including language barriers, cultural differences, and socio-economic disadvantage, which can affect their participation and completion rates. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are less likely to complete a VET qualification when compared to their non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers.⁸ These factors may also be experienced by students of ethnic backgrounds who are experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
- Disconnect between school curriculum and industry needs: Schools in rural and remote areas may not be able to align their curriculum with local industry needs due to the shortage of qualified teachers in a range of subject areas, resulting in a lack of relevant training opportunities and apprenticeship pathways for students.
- Reduced access to support services: Rural and remote communities may have limited access to support services such as career counselling, mentoring, and financial assistance, which are crucial for helping students navigate the apprenticeship process.

⁵ [Apprentice and trainee outcomes 2023 - NCVET - 2024](#)

⁶ [ISA's submission to the VET Workforce Blueprint Consultation Paper - ISA - 2024](#)

⁷ [Education in Remote and Complex Environments - APH - 2020](#)

⁸ [Indigenous VET participation, completion and outcomes: change over the past decade - NCVET - 2017](#)

- Administrative burden: For students, the paperwork requirements and the number of stakeholders involved in applying for and undertaking an ASbA can be daunting and act as a deterrent. A single student's ASbA will usually involve the student, their parents, the school, the AASN provider and an RTO.
- Insufficient school support: Some schools do not offer VET programs for their students, including ASbAs. This is often due to the administrative burden and cost. In some schools, a lack of experienced staff or senior staff buy-in may also contribute to these programs not being made available. For schools that do offer other VET programs, some find the timetable flexibility required for ASbAs to be offered is not feasible for the school.
- Perceptions of VET pathways: Students, families and teachers' perceptions of VET pathways can vary significantly. This is caused in part by VET programs in schools historically being used to provide an alternate non-academic pathway, as well as the mistaken belief that VET programs in schools are tokenistic or a reduced offering when compared to standalone RTOs⁹. Insufficient career advice is also an issue here, as some students may not be aware of the options available to them. It is pleasing to see these perceptions are now changing and VET is more and more being seen as a valid pathway to further study and employment.
- Transportation issues: Students may find it challenging to access apprenticeship training facilities or places of employment due to a lack of available transportation, particularly if these locations are far from their homes or schools. Some employers will require apprentices to have a driver's license, which can be time consuming and costly for students who are not already working towards this. These barriers are exacerbated for students experiencing socio-economic and other disadvantage.

Independent schools in remote locations such as the Northern Territory experience many of these barriers simultaneously. Students are only able to undertake apprenticeships in fields that have local teachers and job opportunities, resulting in far fewer options. This reduction in agency can deter students from pursuing an apprenticeship altogether.

Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach involving collaboration between government agencies, educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and community organisations to improve access to training opportunities, provide targeted support services, and foster partnerships between schools, local businesses and industry.

CONCLUSION



This submission highlights the successes and challenges facing school-based apprentices in Independent schools, as well as those facing students, families and employers.

ISA is committed to improving educational opportunities for young Australians and recognises the value of apprenticeships in Independent schools in providing students with practical life skills, workforce opportunities and a career path prior to leaving school.

A stronger and more consistent incentives system, and initiatives to address affordability and access will need to be implemented if the Australian workforce skills shortage is to improve and all students are to have equity of access.

⁹ [VET delivered to secondary school students scoping study - ASQA - 2021](#)

The way to achieve this is by providing school students with greater choice and access to a range of employment pathways and study options with incentives and support to do so.

It is also important that incentives are not only for areas of current skills shortages, otherwise in a few years we will have an entirely new range of skills shortages.

ISA would be happy to discuss our submission or be involved in further consultation.

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