

VOCATIONAL PATHWAYS
TO EMPLOYMENT

A REVIEW OF VET FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS



Government of South Australia
Department for Education

MINISTER'S FOREWORD



South Australia's Training and Skills Commission estimates that over the five years to 2022, around 247,000 qualifications will need to be delivered to meet the skills requirements of South Australian businesses and of the top 50 occupations with the most growth over the coming years, 82% will need vocational education and training (VET) qualifications rather than a bachelor degree from University.¹

The South Australian government has committed to strengthening vocational pathways from school to employment to help all young people realise their full potential.

Now more than ever we need to raise the status of skilled and technical qualifications to ensure that we are investing in areas that meet our State's skills needs and provide great career opportunities for more young people.

This paper highlights the issues and seeks community and stakeholder feedback on how they can be addressed to unlock the value of VET for students, employers and the South Australian economy.

I would like to hear from all stakeholders on how we can increase opportunities for school students to embark on a career in a vocational field as a valued option alongside a university or other pathway.

This work will inform a VET for Schools Policy which will articulate our approach to ensuring school students have access to high quality vocational pathways. The government will take action to support young people.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'John Gardner'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Hon John Gardner MP
Minister for Education

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THE IMPORTANCE OF VET

The Education Council through its review of the Melbourne Declaration points to the need for schools to prepare students for a lifetime of learning and effective social and economic participation.²

Gonski³ found that top-performing education systems support the individual learning growth of each student, in each year of schooling. The Department for Education's new approach to school improvement aspires to the growth of every child, in every class, in every government school and for some students VET is a means of achieving this.

VET provides nationally recognised qualifications from Certificate I and II entry-level training through to Graduate Diploma, developed by industry to prepare students for work. VET providers include TAFE colleges, private providers, Adult Community Education and enterprise training providers. A vocational pathway provides students with the option to train with a VET provider in work based skills and knowledge to complete a qualification.

VET is a valuable contributor to secondary school learning for students, providing a recognised pathway to employment or further education and training. Completion of VET at school develops competencies that position young people well to participate in the workforce.

Embarking on a vocational pathway at school allows students to get a head start in the world of work and commence a lucrative and worthwhile career. VET for school students has long been regarded by industry as critical in strengthening the connection between education, training and the labour market and supporting the transition from school to work. VET qualifications continue to be in high demand as identified by the Training and Skills Commission.

The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) already recognises the important role VET can play in South Australia's secondary education, with students able to gain up to 150 credits (of the required 200 credits) for successfully completing VET units of competency. The SACE recognises VET qualifications that are listed on the training.gov.au website as the national register of qualifications. The SACE VET Recognition Register lists more than 300 of the most common VET qualifications undertaken by SACE students and indicates how these qualifications may contribute towards the SACE.

In 2018, around 3,500 South Australian government school students undertook VET, including school-based apprenticeships or traineeships (SBATs), while completing their SACE. Of these students, around 1,500 completed a full VET qualification.⁴

SKILLING THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN WORKFORCE

It is essential for the prosperity of all South Australians that our training and skills responses, particularly in schools, match the workforce needs of employers and industry. With the right skills and competencies, school students provide a pipeline of future workers for industry and other key sectors.

In South Australia, it is compulsory for children to be enrolled in and attending school until they turn 16 and in an approved learning program until they turn 17 which includes traditional secondary school, VET or higher education courses, apprenticeships or traineeships.

While young people are better educated than ever before, the transition from school to work is not easy and for many it has become nearly impossible.⁵ The proportion of young South Australians participating in post-school education, training or employment has fallen from 70.6% in 2006 to 67.1% in 2016.⁶ The average unemployment rate for young people aged 15 to 24 years in South Australia over the 12 months to April 2019 was 13.2% and in some regions that figure is markedly greater.⁷ Difficulty finding work can lead some young people to seek other opportunities interstate. More than 181,000 young people (aged 15 to 34 years) have left South Australia since 2002.

According to the Foundation for Young Australians, the average transition time from education to full-time work is 4.7 years, compared to one year in 1986. By the age of 25, only half of young Australians have secured more than 35 hours of work per week, classifying them as full-time employed (ABS definition). Young people have attributed this to not having enough work experience, lack of appropriate education, lack of career management skills and a lack of available jobs.⁸

Technology disruption through robotics, automation and artificial intelligence is changing the nature of work and the types of jobs available. People are living and working longer which can limit the opportunities in the workforce for young people who do not have the comparable skills and experience. Similarly, low economic growth and globalisation impacts the local labour market and makes it more difficult for young people to secure full time work.⁹

There are more than 143,000 small businesses (employing fewer than 20 people) operating in South Australia, or 98% of all businesses in the state and 48% of small to medium enterprises believe that there is a clear skills shortage in their sector.¹⁰ Similarly, the emergence of new industries in South Australia such as defence, space and cyber creates potential employment for young people and they need skilling now for the jobs that will drive our economy in the future.

VET can play a significant role in meeting the skills gaps.

ISSUE 1 PERCEPTION



VET pathways are often not valued and regarded as an option for students who are at risk of disengaging from school, rather than an option for all students to pursue a productive, fulfilling career. There is increasing evidence that some students are discouraged from undertaking a VET pathway and are instead steered towards university education.¹¹

This may be due to widely held but questionable perceptions about vocational careers, despite the evidence telling us something different:

- The median full time income of a VET graduate is \$2,000 higher than that of a graduate of a Bachelor degree. Many VET graduates have the capacity to earn more than Bachelor degree graduates over their careers.¹²
- VET graduates have very strong job outcomes compared to other pathways: 78% of VET graduates are employed after training and the graduate employment rate of VET students who undertook a trade apprenticeship is as high as 92%.¹³
- Students in an apprenticeship reported the highest levels of wellbeing, compared to any other post-school pathway.¹⁴

In addition to challenges regarding the perceived value of VET, there are potentially conflicting views about the perceived purpose of school-enrolled VET between industry and education sectors. While employers emphasise the importance of secondary school VET in attracting young people to vocational careers and assisting students to become 'job ready', some educators see the primary role of VET as keeping students engaged in school and completing Year 12.¹⁵

The SACE Stage 2 Review,¹⁶ reported that in some instances VET qualifications that are unrelated to future pathways are used to improve the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) and 'game the system' which also perpetuates the view that VET is not a valuable senior secondary pathway.

The availability of career information and career services to support students and their families in their decision making is critical. While there is a great deal of career and VET information available, it is often fragmented across a range of websites and other resources.¹⁷ This makes it difficult for many students, families and teachers to find reliable information about occupations, the labour market, courses and providers.

Research undertaken in 2018 showed that while around 50% of young people (aged 15-24) felt they had a good or strong understanding of university pathways, only 19% felt they had a good or strong understanding of VET pathways.

This figure was even lower for apprenticeships and traineeships.¹⁸ In the 2018 Youth Census only 52% of students reported that they received quality career advice throughout their schooling.¹⁹

The South Australian government recognises the need to change attitudes to skilled careers and has progressed:

- Your Passion: Our Multifaceted Marketing Campaign.²⁰
- A new VET Innovation Award for schools.
- A review of best practice career counselling.

Question 1

What more needs to be done to increase awareness and change perceptions about VET and vocational careers?

Question 2

How can we ensure vocational pathways are presented as a credible option to students and families?

ISSUE 2 ACCESS



A common issue regarding school students' access to VET is that funding arrangements are unclear, complex and inconsistent. Access is often influenced by the ability of schools to free up or attract more operational enrolment funding, the availability of other funding (such as government subsidies) or the capacity of students and their families to pay for their training.

In many cases, mainstream school enrolment funding is used to deliver the core school curriculum and due to cost, it can be prohibitive to offer VET using mainstream funding. Some schools deliver VET for school students themselves through auspice arrangements, partly because they see delivery by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) as too expensive.

There is no consistent, system-wide approach to guide government schools in their decisions about how to deliver and fund VET for their students, which means schools (and secondary school alliances) are left to determine which arrangements work best for them. This creates confusion and inconsistency and can lead to inequity between schools in areas of different socioeconomic status (SES) where families have varying capacity to contribute to the cost of training.

The South Australian Department for Innovation and Skills (DIS) funds RTOs to deliver subsidised training to school students through the Training Guarantee for SACE Students (TGSS), school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs), and funds some VET within the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) program.

Between 2012-13 and 2017-18, DIS invested approximately \$90 million to support training through TGSS, approximately \$14.5 million in subsidies for training in SBATs and \$3.7 million which supported VET within the FLO program.²¹

While outcomes are mixed across TGSS, SBATs and FLO, around 54% of school students undertaking subsidised training across all three programs did not achieve a VET qualification completion and around 30% (almost \$38 million) of the funding was for training that did not result in a qualification.²²

The low qualification completion rate for TGSS indicates that the funding is not being used as intended which is to support students to complete both the SACE and a VET certificate and then transition to a higher level VET qualification while at school or if necessary post-school. More than \$29 million funding of TGSS in this period was spent on training which, as highlighted above, did not result in a qualification completion.

To promote greater access, the South Australian government has recently removed eligibility restrictions to commencing a SBAT and made an election commitment to make TGSS places available to students for the full year of their sixteenth birthday.

The organisation and planning for the next school year is done well in advance with options considered by students at least six months prior to the commencement of the year enrolments. Building flexibility in the curriculum, in timetabling and for set periods within the calendar year can be problematic once educational staff have been secured. The availability of VET options for students can be limited by the flexibility within schools to release students to attend training, take up work experience or to meet employers' expectations as part of a SBAT. Similarly, access to VET may be limited by the ability to build a critical mass of students and may require schools to work together within their alliance or with cross-sector schools to ensure VET opportunities are made available to school students.

Access issues are compounded more for some student cohorts that experience significant and complex barriers to accessing VET, including Aboriginal students and students from low SES backgrounds. Limitations to education and training faced by some Aboriginal young people are well documented. The South Australian Aboriginal Secondary Training Academy (SAASTA) is one model that combines VET with SACE to create a pathway to earning or further learning. The Department for Education's recently released Aboriginal Education Strategy signals further opportunities to support young Aboriginal people transition to further study, training and employment, and increasing the percentage of Aboriginal young people undertaking and completing VET.²³

Some of the barriers for school students to access VET may include:

- Thin markets (or areas of low demand) where lower numbers of students can mean that finances, resources and infrastructure to support training delivery are limited.²⁴
- Geographical isolation making it difficult to attract appropriately skilled teachers, RTOs and trainers.
- Difficulty providing students with access to relevant workplaces, particularly in small regional communities.
- Limited capacity to contribute to the cost for VET, tools and materials and or transport.
- Lack of public transport making it difficult for young people to travel to training and work placements.

Question 3

What examples of barriers to access VET courses exist within our education system and how might they be overcome?

Question 4

What can be done to ensure schools are well placed to access and use available funding?

Question 5

What models exist to provide flexibility in schools to support students to access VET?

Question 6

What more can be done to promote access and equity for disadvantaged cohorts?

ISSUE 3 QUALITY



While there are many excellent examples of high quality VET being delivered to school students, concerns have been raised about the quality of content and delivery.

The delivery and assessment of VET for school students must be through RTOs that meet the standards of the national VET Quality Framework regulated by the Australian Skills and Quality Authority (ASQA). Schools make their own decisions in engaging RTOs to deliver VET, in some cases without a legally binding contract in place or a clear understanding of the school's obligations and the regulatory requirements.

South Australia has three school-based RTOs: Thebarton Senior College, Marden Senior College combined with the Open Access College and Hamilton Senior College, that deliver VET to their own students and other schools. These school-based RTOs are subject to the same standards of compliance as other RTOs. If schools are to operate in this way then it is essential that they provide high quality training that meets all requirements of the national training system.

All other schools wishing to offer VET to their students must engage external RTOs or use their own teachers to deliver VET for school students under auspice arrangements with RTOs, including TAFE SA. The level of regulatory oversight of auspice arrangements is often unclear, and inconsistent approaches to quality assurance have the potential to damage public confidence in VET for school students.²⁵

There have been examples of schools commencing delivery to students without valid agreements in place or the availability of appropriate resources. Schools have identified a need for RTOs to be more proactive and responsive when setting up these arrangements. TAFE SA as the main provider of auspicing is working to improve the arrangements.

Under the standards, teachers are required to have teaching and assessment qualifications and industry currency to deliver VET. Not all schools prioritise these requirements which can make auspicing high risk for RTOs.

Another challenge in ensuring high quality VET delivery to school students lies in the difference between assessment methodologies used in school education and VET. Many school-based trainers experience challenges in implementing competency-based assessment. In an RTO environment this would be regularly checked through validation, however, the validation in auspiced delivery in schools is sporadic.

Non-compliance against the standards in the national VET Quality Framework can result in serious consequences for students and RTOs with qualifications put in jeopardy. In extreme cases, ASQA has made the decision to cancel the registration of, or refused to re-register, RTOs that deliver significant volumes of training to secondary school students.

There is a lack of data on the effectiveness of VET delivered to secondary students. Currently, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research's (NCVER) Graduate Outcomes Survey is not extended to secondary students enrolled in VET. As such, information is not nationally collected about VET school students' motivations for enrolling, their satisfaction with the course or their outcomes.

Currently there is no mechanism for tracking pathways and outcomes for all secondary students which prevents governments from comparing the post-school outcomes for those who participate in VET as part of their secondary schooling and those who do not.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National School Reform Agreement signed by the Premier of South Australia in November 2018 commits to implementing a national unique student identifier (USI) that meets national privacy requirements in order to support better understanding of student progression and improve the national evidence base.

Question 7

What arrangements need to be put in place to assure consistent levels of quality?

Question 8

How do we build industry and employer confidence in VET for school students?

Question 9

What is the best mechanism to deliver quality VET for school students?

Question 10

How can employers and industry contribute to the quality of VET delivered to secondary students?

ISSUE 4 RELEVANCE



The most important purpose of delivering VET to school students must be to provide students with strong and clear pathways to careers and employment. It is therefore critical that training is relevant to employers, students and the South Australian economy.

As highlighted in the Joyce Review, dual systems such as Denmark and Germany feature enduring links between schools and local businesses, formally constituted as social partners in legislation.²⁶ Switzerland also has a successful model for pathways connecting schools and workplaces. Whilst some strong partnerships exist in South Australia, industry could be better integrated into the schooling systems to co-design, engage with and endorse the work of schools to ensure relevance of VET, provide career learning and immersion opportunities and promote pathways to employment.

Ensuring school enrolled VET remains relevant and fit-for-purpose by responding to the changing needs of industry and the labour market presents a significant challenge. Employers report that some school enrolled VET graduates are not work-ready and may lack the workplace and enterprise skills required by industry. Feedback from employers has also questioned whether school students undertaking VET are engaging in enough training to develop the workplace standards for the competencies they require, and suggested that clearer requirements about length of training are needed to improve confidence in the system.²⁷

From schools' perspective, balancing limited resources between the delivery of VET and the school curriculum can make it difficult to provide students with opportunities to undertake sufficient hours of training and practice opportunities.

It is not currently common practice to assess student competency, identify gaps and tailor a package of VET training to meet their needs prior to embarking on a vocational pathway. This approach would value-add and is likely to make school enrolled VET graduates more aligned to the needs of employers.

Work placements and work experience opportunities have been declining due to the difficulties reported by employers in establishing them. These opportunities help to showcase what it is like to work in the industry as well as providing appropriate workplace learning. There is also a lack of high quality taster programs that give school students an understanding of industries and occupations.

Packaging VET units of competency to offer skill sets and taster programs as part of the secondary school pathway is seen as valuable for many students and employers although these would currently need to be funded within school mainstream funding or by students and families. The SACE Stage 2 Review highlights the opportunities to use micro-credentialing to accredit clusters of units from different certificates within the SACE²⁸ which is likely to be positively received by employers and form a valuable part of a pathway.

The Training and Skills Commission recommends that government works with industry to make it easier for industry and schools to connect to deliver accurate career information and meaningful work experience to students.²⁹ However, many schools lack the dedicated resources and in some cases the know-how to create opportunities and build relationships with industry.

Employers have expressed interest in engaging school students before they turn 18 so that they are well on the way to complete their apprenticeship before they finish school.

The introduction of Flexible SBATs creates new opportunities for employers and industry to co-design a pathway with schools that provides employees with the right skills and competencies for the workplace. School students can commence a vocational career early and spend the majority of their time in year 12 in the workplace as well as completing their SACE. Whilst in the pilot stage in 2019, Flexible SBATs have the potential to build a bridge between schools and industry, promoting greater outcomes for students who are planning to transition directly from school to employment.

Question 11

To what extent should students' pathways to earning or learning be made more flexible?

Question 12

What more can be done to ensure school enrolled VET students are work-ready?

Question 13

What arrangements can be put in place to build closer relationships between school and industry?

WHAT ELSE ARE WE DOING?

Consultation and feedback gathered through this review will inform the development of a VET for Schools Policy which will be released later in the year.

Other activities that are progressing in parallel will inform the Policy: the Review of Career Counselling in Schools and the Review of Costing and Funding VET in Government Schools.

Release of the Policy will complement other initiatives taking place in South Australia, including:

- The introduction of Flexible School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs) co-designed with employers to give industry a stronger voice and school students a head start in the world of work.
- The release of Future-proofing the South Australian Apprenticeship and Traineeship System, Recommendations Paper 2019 to strengthen the apprenticeship and traineeship system for South Australia.
- A review of the Training and Skills Development Act 2008 to ensure it provides an effective framework for skills and workforce development in South Australia.
- Skilling South Australia is helping more people get skills and qualifications to build lasting careers and meet the needs of industry. The State Government is investing \$100m, with a further \$103m from the Commonwealth Government to create an additional 20,800 apprenticeships and traineeships over four years.
- Your Passion – Our Multifaceted Marketing Campaign to raise awareness, change perceptions and increase interest in apprenticeships and traineeships.

PROVIDING YOUR FEEDBACK

You can provide feedback by completing an online survey or providing a written submission via YourSAy. For further information please visit www.education.sa.gov.au/VETpathways

Feedback will also be gathered through a range of targeted activities including:

- Consultation forums across regional and metropolitan South Australia.
- Focus groups with key stakeholders.

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