

Variations in VET Provision across Australian Schools and Their Effects on Student Outcomes

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vocational education and training (VET) represents one of the most significant reforms to the senior secondary curriculum in Australian schools over recent decades. Introduced to expand curricular options and provide work-based training and qualifications, the numbers of students participating in VET have more than trebled since the mid-1990s. Over 90 per cent of schools now deliver some VET subjects. While VET is an important component of senior secondary programs across Australia, each state or territory system locates VET in a different curricular context. Some systems stipulate that all VET subjects must be accredited, meeting the requirements of the industry-specific Training Packages that are central to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Subjects that meet AQF requirements are known as VET-in-Schools subjects (and are referred to in this report with the acronym VETiS, with the term VET used to describe the other VET programs offered in school). However, full AQF accreditation is not deemed essential by all systems. There are some systems in which schools may offer VET subjects that are school-delivered and school-assessed only. Differences such as these between the different states and territories tend to impose broad constraints on how schools implement VET, leading to differences *between* systems. There is also considerable variation in the delivery of VET *within* systems. In each system, some schools go to the very limit of what is possible, offering school-based apprenticeships and vigorous multi-strand VET-in-Schools (VETiS) programs that allow students to achieve recognised qualifications and advanced credit in TAFE. Other schools may respond weakly, providing ‘taster’ VET only, while other schools deliver no VET at all.

The aim of this report is to develop a school-based typology that captures some of the variation in VET provision across Australian schools. Models of VET provision are constructed using information on system-level policies, obtained from state and territory curriculum authorities, and information on school-level delivery derived from a national survey of schools and students. Data derived from the schools and students involved in the *Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth* 1998 Cohort contribute to the construction of the typology. The report not only focuses on the types or models of VET provision, but also their impact on school completion rates and on initial post-school outcomes for different groups of students.

It is important to note that the period covered by the data in this report relates to the time between 1999 and 2002. The schools data were collected in 1999. From that time there have been further changes in the provision and accreditation of VET in Schools. The impact of more recent changes will not be reflected in the results of this report.

Main Findings

Models of VET provision

One of the important outcomes of the analyses presented here is the construction of a classification of the main models or types of VET provision. The introduction of VET in Schools posed a difficult challenge for the senior secondary curriculum. Accredited VET requires the use of competency based-assessments, but it is difficult to integrate these into academic frameworks that were designed to deliver finely-graded assessments suited to the needs of tertiary entrance. This problem may be resolved in one of two ways. One is to create new subjects that count towards the Year 12 certificate. This response could be described as the *school model* for the provision of VETiS, because it attempts to incorporate VET into the existing Year 12 structure. It represents a form of dual accreditation, since these VET subjects count towards senior secondary qualifications and tertiary admission, while at the same time leading to accredited VET certificates. The other

main approach has been to provide stand-alone VET subjects which in some jurisdictions do not count towards the Year 12 certificate. Rather, they are organized around the industry training packages, and aligned with AQF qualifications. This response could be described as the *TAFE model* of VET, because the subjects offered under this model are the same as, or are based on, those delivered by TAFE or by other Registered Training Organizations (RTOs) in the VET sector.

Within both the *school model* and the *TAFE model* there are variations related to the degree of emphasis on structured workplace learning. In some schools *all* VET students participate in structured workplace learning; in others a high proportion of students participate in structured workplace learning; and in others very few students are able to participate in the workplace. In addition, there are schools in which VET is offered without any workplace learning, and other schools in which no VET is offered at all. Consideration of all of these elements provides a basis for grouping schools into seven types, organized into three broad models:

School model with workplace learning: VET studies are integrated with the senior curriculum and accredited towards the school certificate:

1. All programs incorporate workplace learning (12 per cent of all schools)
2. Strong emphasis on workplace learning (26 per cent of all schools)
3. Weak emphasis on workplace learning (19 per cent of all schools)

TAFE model with workplace learning: Most VET studies are stand-alone and not accredited towards the senior school certificate:

4. Strong emphasis on workplace learning (13 per cent of all schools)
5. Weak emphasis on workplace learning (13 per cent of all schools)

VET without workplace learning or no VET:

6. VET does not include any workplace learning (10 per cent of all schools)
7. No VET is offered (8 per cent of all schools)

If schools are classified in this way by type or model of VET provision it becomes evident that there are substantial variations in the numbers of schools of each type across the states and territories, by school sector (Catholic, government independent), by region (metropolitan, provincial, rural and remote), and social intake (SES backgrounds of students).

Impact of VET provision on Year 12 completion and initial post school outcomes

Schools that have a higher concentration of VET students tend also to have higher non-completion rates, irrespective of type of VET provision. Non-completion rates range from 28 per cent in schools where VET counts towards the Year 12 certificate and there is a strong emphasis on workplace learning to 9 per cent in schools without any VET. However, in schools which offer VET there is some indication that those who chose VET in the senior secondary years of schooling were more likely to have changed their intention about completing school by Year 11 from the intention which they held at Year 9. This change of mind might have been because of the availability of VET at school.

The data from the LSAY cohort was used to address two important aspects of VET in schools:

- Whether different forms of VET provision impact differently on completion of Year 12 and initial post school outcomes; and
- Whether VET students had different outcomes to non-VET students of similar academic ability and background.

Impact of different forms of VET provision on Year 12 completion

The analysis in this study suggests that the *school model* had greater impact on Year 12 completion than the other models of VET provision:

- In schools where VET subjects count towards the Year 12 certificate, school completion rates were higher among those students who participated in VET.
- In these schools, the non-completion rate for students doing VET in Year 11 was 14 per cent; a rate that was almost as low as for non-VET students (12 per cent).
- The non-completion rates for students in equivalent schools that offered the TAFE-model of VET were significantly higher (20 per cent).

Thus, there may be advantages for students who study VET in terms of Year 12 completion in schools where VET counts towards the Year 12 certificate. These advantages remained after controlling statistically for school differences in intake, location, state and sector. This may suggest that VET study helps engage or re-engage students in school.

Impact of VET provision on initial post-school activities

While non-VET students are far more likely to go to university than VET students, for those not going to university there are advantages in having participated in VET while at school. For students who did not go to university, there was a greater likelihood of getting an apprenticeship, studying at TAFE or gaining full time jobs for those who enrolled in VET compared to those who did not enrol in VET.

The mode of VET provision impacts differently on students. While provision of *school-model VET* is associated with a greater likelihood of completing school compared to other models of VET provision, the *TAFE-model VET* provision seems to have some better labour market outcomes. An analysis of results for students not entering university shows that students in schools that offer *TAFE-model VET* with a strong emphasis on workplace learning had significantly greater odds of entering TAFE than of being unemployed, when compared with VET students in schools where VET counts towards Year 12.

The benefits of certain forms of VET provision appear not only for Year 12 completers, but also for non-completers. In terms of VET study, attending a school that offers TAFE-type VET with a strong emphasis on workplace learning appears to increase the odds of engaging in TAFE or being in at least part-time study or work, rather than being unemployed after leaving school.

Conclusions

At a general level, the results suggest that whereas schools adopting the integrated models of VET tended to promote higher retention in school for VET participants, the schools providing stand-alone VET programs tended to promote better initial post-school outcomes — better in terms of avoiding unemployment and successfully entering pathways involving tertiary study, apprenticeships and entry to full-time work. In this sense the TAFE Model of VET provision in schools seemed to promote positive post-school outcomes while the School Model seemed to promote better completion rates for participants.