

The House Standing Committee on Employment, Employment and Training has been asked to inquire into and report on the perceptions and status of vocational education and training.

Dear Committee Members,

The Australian Centre for Career Education (ACCE) is pleased to provide feedback to the inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training (VET).

The Australian Centre for Career Education is a national not-for-profit thought leader in career development, a national association, and founding member association of the national peak industry body, The Career Education Council of Australia (CICA).

ACCE was established by the Victorian Government in 1975 to train teachers in career education to support students to make informed subject choices and successful transitions from school. ACCE is a CICA endorsed training provider of career professionals through its CEAV Institute (RTO 22523) and has trained career professionals in Victoria, Tasmania, WA, NSW, and Queensland.

ACCE is the largest provider of career services in Victoria and delivers over 34,000 vocational assessments to year 9 students in government schools and equivalent settings each year followed by a career guidance session. We are the sole provider of the Jobs Victoria Career Counsellors service and have delivered over 26,000 career guidance sessions to the Victorian community since July 2021.

ACCE has reviewed the information and issues relating to this inquiry and makes the following recommendations to the Committee:

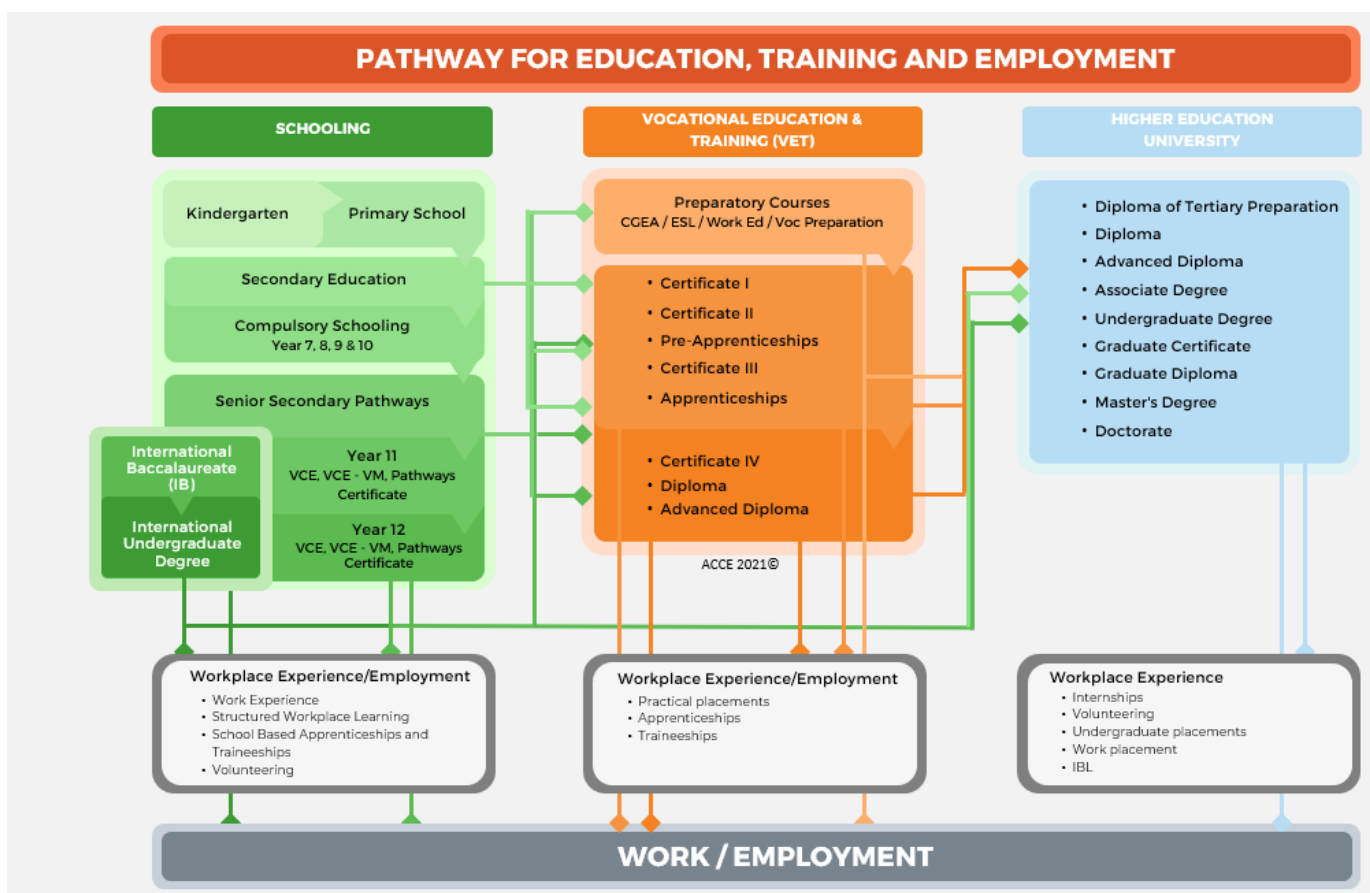
Summary of Recommendations

1. Ensure students receive career education in school so that they are adequately prepared to make sound pathway choices and have access to clear information about all course options, costs, delivery modality/location, employment outcomes, and labour market information.
2. Promote paraprofessional in tandem with professional careers and demonstrate the link between occupations at both levels as workforces need both not one or the other.
3. Promote VET as an equal curriculum provider to ensure that the wider Australia community and students understand the benefits of the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) and its application in their pathway choices.
4. Remove the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) as the sole measure of senior secondary success as it has emphasised the higher education sector at the expense of VET.
5. Promote VET as an equal curriculum provider to ensure that the wider Australia community and students understand the benefits of the AQF and its application in their pathway choices.
6. Restore the initial purpose of the VET system by ensuring quality courses and teaching, and access to a range of appropriate assessment methodologies.
7. Communicate the pathways between VET and higher education courses and address inequity in costs /funding so that students can move between VET and higher education as intended without penalty.
8. Provide a payment to support a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes to increase the uptake of VET courses (particularly relevant for transitioning workers, those returning to the workforce or seeking to improve their employment outcomes).
9. Promote roles and industries linked to VET courses so that learners are engaged in their learning and more likely to make successful career pathway choices.
10. Build practicum and work placement opportunities into VET courses.
11. Ensure there are strong industry partnerships to meet industry requirements within course design and assessment, and to support employment amongst completing students.
12. Vocational assessment to be carried out at the point of entry to all VET courses and all providers held accountable for the successful development of work readiness in the pre graduating students.
13. Ensure identification and classification of industry employability skills by Jobs and Skills Australia so that tertiary education providers can include these skills and fill any gaps within their courses.

Submission to the inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training

Before addressing the key issues of the inquiry, it is important to acknowledge that Australia has the AQF which is globally unique. The framework enables individuals to select suitable education and training pathways across their lifespan. Unfortunately for many people in Australia the AQF remains a mystery and the purpose of providing a seamless education and training system has remained elusive to governments and citizens alike.

The ACCE diagram below illustrates Australia's key learning pathways to employment. Most importantly, none of the pillars or steps are more important than the other – kindergarten entry is as important as exiting at doctorate level. As students' progress through school, they can transition to curriculum in vocational education and training or in higher education. Choices are not limited and the potential to move between levels expands as students' progress through the system.



Across the lifespan, individuals can choose between VET and higher education courses as long as they take no more than two steps between AQF levels.

Despite this uniquely versatile system, ACCE's experience reveals that the AQF is not well understood. ACCE teaches the AQF framework in its CEAV Institute (RTO 22523) to ensure that future career development practitioners can support students and adults to make sound pathway and career choices and have a solid understanding of the labour market and skills and education pathways.

The AQF provides an interconnected system of learning that Australia should be proud of as it supports the career development of citizens across their life. The fact this the framework is not well understood and promoted is in part linked to the issues in this inquiry.



Inquiry Issues

1. information available to students about VET qualifications and related career pathways along a student's journey through secondary schools, vocational education, higher education, and work transitions, with a focus on how this combines with other sources of advice, including informal advice, to influence student choices, and how Commonwealth funded information for students about VET may be improved;

Career development is a complex process and must be delivered in a developmentally appropriate way if school students are to connect to their learning and make a successful transition from school. Career education and guidance has been proven to reduce the number of students that end up not in education or employment¹. It provides greater equity in outcomes for students from disadvantaged cohorts and low SES schools and reduces the lack of clarity and poor pathway choices students can make when career education is missing.

However, it is potluck what each school provides in the preparation for students to make these life changing decisions². The process of pathway decision-making is critical for students who must gain exposure to the world of work, labour market information, and pathway information to make informed subject choices and successfully transition from school. There is an incorrect assumption by jurisdictions across the country that career education is a central part of curriculum delivery. However, Australia has no mandated career education subject in the Australian Curriculum and ACARA has advised ACCE that it is not coming any time soon. While some jurisdictions have career

¹ Holman, J. (2014). *Good Career Guidance*. The Gatsby Charitable Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/gatsby-sir-john-holman-good-career-guidance-2014.pdf>

² Groves, O., Austin, K., O'Shea, S. et al. (2021). 'One student might get one opportunity and then the next student won't get anything like that': Inequities in Australian career education and recommendations for a fairer future. *Australian Educational Researcher*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00468-2>

practitioners in schools to support student decision-making their time can be limited, and this has only worsened due to COVID and teacher shortages.³

In some jurisdictions and school systems, there are no mandated career practitioners in schools. ACCE has observed that the role can fall to unqualified staff based on school level decisions and budget constraints. However, the national peak industry body, the Career Industry Council of Australia, requires career professionals to hold a CICA endorsed Graduate Certificate in Career Development (at level 8) or higher and complete a minimum of 15-hours professional development per annum.

The current lack of optics about what is really happening in career education across the country has given governments a false view of the reality for students – the reality is that schools are operating without formal career education and are under resourced to deliver core business. Without specific training in career practice and resources, teachers who are experts in other curriculum subject are unable to operationalise career development in the current curriculum. This is contrary to the job of schools which is to prepare students for the workforce.

The time taken for students to discover their first career is potentially damaging to their confidence, costly, and directly impacts lifelong earnings and Australia’s productivity. Across all tertiary training students are making the wrong course choices. While parents and teachers remain important support for students, many lack an understanding of the pathway options available and how to support the development of students’ career decision-making skills. It takes time for students to reflect on themselves and their interests and understand how these link to pathway options. Equally, it takes time for dedicated career practitioners to navigate the ‘opportunity market’, understand a wide range of options before supporting students to prepare to make decisions that include VET choices.

Recommendations

- Ensure students receive career education in school so that they are adequately prepared to make sound pathway choices and have access to clear information about all course options, costs, delivery modality/location, employment outcomes and labour market information.
 - Promote VET as an equal curriculum provider to ensure that Australia and students understand the benefits of the AQF and its application in their pathway choices.
2. perceptions and status of the VET sector and how this may be impacting student enrolment choices, employer engagement, and recruitment and retention of the VET educator workforce, and how perceptions and status of the VET sector can be improved. International best practices in relation to VET perception and qualifications status should be examined;
- Australia has for years promoted an ATAR entrant score as a means of accessing the limited funded places in higher education. Many students have bought into the belief that the ATAR is a

³ Yarra Regional Career Group and CEAV. (2021). *Conditions for Career Practitioners in Victorian Schools*. <https://ceav.vic.edu.au/media/252048/conditions-for-career-practitioners-in-victorian-schools-report-082021-final.pdf>

ticket to long term successful employment and higher wages and that a VET pathway has lower outcome expectancy. However, the data reveals similar outcomes for each⁴:

| VET outcomes for apprentices and trainees 2021 | University undergraduate outcomes 2021 |
|---|--|
| \$52k median salary for apprentices and trainees | \$65k median salary for graduates employed full-time |
| 91.8% employed after training | 84.8% employed after graduation |

Initially, it suited higher education to have high demand and many schools that consider themselves 'ivy league' have pushed high ATAR scores as their key achievement to parents. Similarly, many parents have bought into the message. Now, many higher education providers are also offering VET courses which can support a pathway across their institution to higher education courses. For those who could not enter via a funded university place this is a viable option. However, not all providers or higher education courses offer a pathway or credit transfer, and this increases the costs. For disadvantaged or struggling cohorts, it is a barrier to lifelong learning.

- RPL is an underutilised aspect of VET that has distinct benefits for workforce development. In Nova Scotia, the government engaged the Nova Scotia Career Development Foundation to implement an RPL program to support those in the field to complete a relevant qualification. However, RPL is a time-consuming process involving mapping learned skills and knowledge and providers can be reluctant to apply RPL due to the time it takes to complete and a reduction in revenue stream for subjects where an RPL is applied. Underutilised RPL is likely to impact transitioning workers, individuals returning to the workforce, and those seeking to improve their employment outcomes. The government has a role to play in supporting the development of an efficient and streamlined RPL processes between AQF levels.
- Victoria has introduced senior secondary pathway reforms to improve the perception of VET as a pathway option. It is imperative that the school system provide this clarity as it is the job of schools to prepare students for the workforce.
- Australia has lost many of the industry-led trade schools that made students competent to gain employment. Some VET courses are over assessed, and it appears some providers feel they must justify the cost of a course by imposing a greater than necessary workload on the learner. VET is a competency-based system and assessments can be delivered in a range of ways. The overreliance on compliance and Training Package rules has complicated the learning process for Trainers and Assessors impacting on the sector as a whole. The system appears to have lost sight of this. For example, in the past an assessor may have asked a student to demonstrate they can successfully make a coffee and explain the key principles and requirements. If the student demonstrated this and explained it correctly, the assessor marked the student as competent.

⁴ National Skills Commission. (2022). Improving the employment prospects of young people, Labour Market and Research and Analysis Branch. [PowerPoint slides]. <https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/media/fxgiyft/presentation-improving-the-employment-prospects-of-young-people-a-resource-for-career-advisors.pdf>

As an example, ACCE has modified its two courses to be suitable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners in partnership with the Aboriginal Teaching and Learning Service. The redesign is based on traditional indigenous teaching and learning methodologies. By the middle of 2023, ten Aboriginal learners will have completed the course and two are currently employed in the ACCE Jobs Victoria Career Counselling service. This work was specifically undertaken to ensure that Australia had an Aboriginal career development workforce to Close the Gap for Aboriginal students and adults in community. Course delivery and assessment have been worked on for the entirety of 2022 to ensure learning and assessment methods are specific to the needs of learners.

- Australia has divested its learning from industry and made the individual responsible for navigating the myriad of training packages and independent training providers. More work is required for learners to understand the possible range of employment outcomes that are available and what work roles will be like. While the Labour Market Portal provides the necessary summaries, it does not bring this workplace knowledge to life for the learner. Nor does it support a career development approach to building life learning skills.

Recommendations

- Remove the ATAR as the sole measure of senior secondary success as it has emphasised the higher education sector at the expense of VET.
 - Promote paraprofessional in tandem with professional careers and demonstrate the link between occupations at both levels as workforces need both not one or the other.
 - Promote VET as an equal curriculum provider to ensure that the wider Australia community and students understand the benefits of the AQF and its application in their pathway choices.
 - Restore the initial purpose of the VET system by ensuring quality courses and teaching, and access to a range of appropriate assessment methodologies.
 - Communicate the pathways between VET and higher education courses and address inequity in costs /funding so that students can move between VET and higher education as intended.
 - Provide a payment to support an RPL processes to increase the uptake of VET courses (particularly relevant for transitioning workers, those returning to the workforce or seeking to improve their employment outcomes).
 - Promote roles and industries linked to VET courses so that learners are engaged in their learning and more likely to make successful career pathway choices.
3. successful partnerships between VET providers and employers that have demonstrably created career pathways and secure employment opportunities for students, considering the best practice elements of these successful partnerships, and how more partnering may be encouraged among VET providers and employers; and
- Importantly, all courses offered by VET providers required an industry panel to oversee their content and relevance to learners being able to gain employment and being work ready for employers. Theoretically, this ensures that learners are engaged in relevant learning that will results in post study employment. How this is being monitored and if it is delivering positive

results, is debatable.

One VET provider engaging both students and industry in learning outcomes is the Endeavour training school. A registered training provider for the electricity sector belonging to an electricity retailer and asset manager ensuring that its students are trained to industry standards. No matter where they work in Australia, their know-how and qualification are transferrable, even into different electricity networks, because industry understands the training that is delivered.

Similarly, ACCE has an RTO division, the CEAV Institute (RTO 22523) established to train career development practitioners. It delivers a Certificate IV in Career Development Practice (level 4) and a Graduate Certificate in Career Development Practice (level 8) qualification. Both qualifications are delivered across Australia using a hybrid face-to-face and online delivery model. Both courses are also endorsed by the national peak industry body, The Career Industry Council of Australia. It is an industry requirement that career professionals complete an endorsed Graduate Certificate at level 8 or equivalent to be eligible to list on the National Career Institute's Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners. Career practitioners with Level 4 qualifications gain associate entry standing in the profession. They work alongside the professional not instead of the professional.

The CEAV Institute's trainers and assessors are experienced career professionals, and the courses have had input from leading Australian career academic, Dr Mary McMahon, as well as industry representation. As VET curriculum, the courses are designed so that career development can be operationalised in practice in schools, community settings, and private career practice. Graduating students are eligible to apply for membership of any of the CICA associations. As ACCE is the sole provider of the Jobs Victoria Career Counsellors service, students can undertake practicum experience in a leading community career service for the duration of its funding by Jobs Victoria.

These are two examples where industry relevant engagement in course design and development has proven effective.

- In higher education, the most popular courses selected by students are the ones that offer practicum or industry placement. Similar offerings in VET will increase student uptake as they improve student workforce development and are likely to increase later workforce participation. Melbourne Polytechnic and the Banyule Nillumbik Tech School have developed a high-quality industry engagement plan to support students, the schools, and industry and there are likely to be many positive examples of this kind of engagement. There are also instances where particular VET providers are not so engaged, and this may impact the quality of the output for students – the ultimate aim is employment. It is therefore imperative to ensure quality industry engagement to ensure course design and assessment is relevant to industry, and to provide employment opportunities for completing students.
- In addition, the needs of industry are not always clearly articulated in courses. For 20-years industry has been requesting a range of employability skills. The new Jobs and Skills Australia should ensure a robust skill set is collected and universally understood to include and fill any

gaps within Australia's tertiary education courses. These must be clearly understood and agreed by industry and assessed by providers as part of student skill development.

Recommendations

- Build practicum and work placement opportunities into VET courses.
- Strong industry partnership and engagement to meet industry requirements within course design and assessment, and to support employment amongst completing students.
- Vocational assessment to be carried out at the point of entry to all VET courses and all providers held accountable for the successful development of work readiness in the pre graduating students.
- Identification and classification of employability skills by Jobs and Skills Australia to ensure Australia's tertiary education provides can fill the gaps within their courses.

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