

## **IEUA RESPONSE TO SCHOOLS COUNCIL DISCUSSION PAPER:**

### **THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN VOCATIONAL PREPARATION OF AUSTRALIAN SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS**

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#### **1. PREAMBLE**

The Independent Education Union of Australia welcomes the Schools Councils' discussion paper "The Role of Schools in the Vocational Preparation of Australia's Senior Secondary Students" as encouraging further examination and debate on the fundamental role and purpose of schools and the interrelationship of schools with the other sectors of education and training in the Australian education context.

As the national Union representing education staff in non-government schools, the IEU is of the view that the document properly highlights and provides a strong analysis of the key issues in relation to curriculum assessment and certification arrangements across the nation and considers approaches which may prepare young people for the workforce. Nevertheless the IEU believes it does not adequately focus the role and purpose of schools in the current context - educational, economic, industrial and political.

The IEU's response and recommendations are therefore confined to the expectations of schools and how schools respond to those expectations, and within this context, the role and resourcing of schools in the provision of vocational education.

#### **2. WHAT IS EXPECTED OF SCHOOLS**

The IEU supports the general thrust of the considerable body of work produced by various education working parties over the past 5 years, in particular, the Finn and Mayer reports, and the further developmental work on public policy arising from those reports. From these collaborative endeavours there has emerged broad agreement across the community that schools have a central role in:

- the preparation of young people for a range of post school options/ destinations;
- giving students a broad range of skills and knowledge to participate effectively in life.

However, the rapidly changing context in which schools operate and the consequent impact upon schools require examination.

##### **2.1 Factors Influencing the Expectations of Schools - the Current Context**

###### **2.1.1 The changing nature of the Youth Labour Market**

The restructuring of the Australian economy and industry has resulted in a demand for a more qualified and skilled workforce. The discussion paper notes that this has resulted in a fall in the number of low-skilled, full-time youth jobs, available for less qualified school leavers.

### 2.1.2 Demand for certain skills to enter the labour market

As industry has restructured, it has become more proactive in analysing and articulating its skill and qualification needs and on how the Australian education and training system can meet those needs. The key competency agenda is a major response to these demands.

### 2.1.3 Credentialism as a sorting mechanism

The discussion paper notes the historical influence of the higher education sector upon the senior school curriculum and the higher value placed on studies at university and on credentials from university. Essentially this powerful influence controls curriculum and assessment in post compulsory education and has acted as an impediment to schools providing what should be equally valued, vocationally oriented courses.

### 2.1.4 Higher Parent & Student Expectations regarding Tertiary Studies

The public policy moves to encourage increased retention rates to Year 12 has had a concomitant rise in parent and student expectations regarding access to tertiary studies. The fact that there are limited higher education places puts considerable pressure on schools to assist students to understand the broader options available and not to be dispirited and alienated by the knowledge that the “valued” post school destination (i.e. University) may well be out of their reach.

### 2.1.5 Ongoing demands for relevant and quality education

There have been quite profound changes in the Australian economy and industry over the past five years, and these changes are driving demands for relevant and quality education. The difficulty for schools is that they can't “stop the world” while the key participants engage in rigorous debate on the form, structure and implementation for such relevant and quality education. At the present time, teachers are struggling to understand and implement the key education reforms, while at the same time fulfilling current teaching requirements.

### 2.1.6 The diversity of the school population

Schools are required to meet the broad educational needs of a very diverse school population. Relevant and quality education has to be delivered across the K-12 levels to students of different socio economic and cultural backgrounds and with different learning styles and capacities.

Schools are required to balance the need for relevant vocational education within their operation with the educational needs of the broad student population.

### 2.1.7 Renewed demands for improved outcomes in Literacy and Numeracy

The renewed demands for improved outcomes in literacy and numeracy have the disquieting potential to fuel the ardour of the “back to basics”

lobby, particularly when the education system is undergoing the stresses of major internal debate and reform.

## **2.2 The Effect on Schools**

The pressure on schools to respond to these factors and to be “more relevant” has been considerable. At a time when resources are limited and retention rates increasing, schools are now expected to:

- produce more students with higher levels of certification
- produce more students with some industry specific skills for entry into the workplace or into further education and training
- produce students with generic workplace skills which are immediately “useful” to employers
- minimise inequalities of opportunity by catering for all students in terms of their possible pathways and destinations
- increase the participation of young people in vocational education and training generally
- increase links with industry

## **2.3 How do Schools View their Role**

There are over 300,000 teachers and school officers employed in over 10,000 government and non-government schools across Australia. Schooling in Australia is a mass industry with a strong sense of tradition and established practice. To shift the thinking, practice and culture within schools remains a major challenge for policy makers, yet there are a number of areas of general consensus in schools which are not clearly articulated in the report. For example:

- (a) there is a good deal of consensus that there is a need to change the emphasis on university control of curriculum, assessment and credentialling and indeed this is occurring to a large degree already.
- (b) there is an understanding by systems, schools and teachers that young people are not being absorbed into the labour market and that schools need to ensure that students are able to present something other than TER details to potential employers.
- (c) there is a desire for more relevant curriculum, assessment and teaching methodologies in general, and schools and teachers are actively engaged in professional development to this end.
- (d) there is consensus that schools need to have broader curriculum offerings, particularly in the vocational area.
- (e) there is a consensus that all school courses should be accredited and articulate into further education and training.

It is the view of the IEU that these are significant understandings on the part of schools and should be recognised and acknowledged within the various public policy forums and discussion papers.

## 2.4 Some Current Approaches

Schools and systems alike have been involved over the last few years in a range of initiatives all designed to address the regime of needs in terms of senior secondary schooling. These involve such initiatives as:

- (i) structural changes - senior colleges, extended days etc.;
- (ii) joint school TAFE initiatives;
- (iii) broader vocational education offerings, associated accreditation for schools and teachers and credit transfer and articulation arrangements;
- (v) industry placement of students and a recognition that schools need to rethink their work organisation arrangements to be able to do this.

## 3.0 CRUX OF THE PROBLEM

If there is a current and developing consensus within the school sector of its role in terms of ensuring students experience their schooling as relevant in terms of education, training and employment options, the real issue is the clarification of the extent to which secondary schools should have a role and should devote resources to the provision of vocational education.

3.1 The questions then concern the role and extent of provision of vocational education by schools particularly in relation to the role of TAFE (and the Higher Education Sector) in providing vocational education.

- Are schools being required to simply address insufficient provision in the post-school sector?
- There is a need to clarify the extent of resourcing and other issues associated with an increased role in the provision of vocational education, such as
  - . the capital costs associated with vocational training courses
  - . the training and accreditation of teachers to teach accredited courses
  - . the structural changes need in both human resource and capital resource arrangements and associated costs

### **3.2 Competing challenges**

Given that many initiatives have been the result of targeted pilot funding, such as the Carmichael Pilots, it is unacceptable to suggest that many of the aspects required for quality provision in vocational education can be resourced by taking funding from other areas of schooling. What is required is a comprehensive examination of the resourcing and extent of provision of vocational training generally in Australia.

It is important to recognise that the schooling system must provide quality teaching and learning for all students across the K-12 years.

There are many other issues which must be addressed by schools and systems:

- Early years - literacy etc.
- Middle years - appropriate structures, resourcing, pedagogy etc
- Special needs students
- changing emphasis on outcomes-based education and meeting individual needs
- Class size increases over the last few years
- greater community involvement re parent participation , inter agency approaches to welfare etc.

### **4.0 MODELS OF SENIOR SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL PROVISIONS**

While providing an interesting analytical framework, casting of the various state systems as either divided or unitary and proposing an integrated model does not really address the problem of the role, and extent and resourcing of secondary school provision of vocational education and training. Notwithstanding this comment, the IEU supports the view that the integrated model is the framework which would provide greater flexibility and diversity in terms of student options and the capacity to integrate vocational with general learning in terms of curriculum and assessment arrangements, the establishment of a single umbrella credential, and giving a proper value to vocational studies.

The problems that remain in all states are:

- the appropriate balance and resourcing of universities and other vocational providers
- the role of schools and extent to which they participate in the provision of vocational training
- the continued development and refining of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and structures to enable schools to offer quality education including vocational education and training

## **5.0 IEUA RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) urgent need for clarification in terms of the intent of vocational education and training in Australia and the role of secondary schools in this endeavour given the broader purposes of schooling generally
- (ii) appropriate resourcing frameworks
- (iii) single umbrella credential with accreditation for school courses
- (iv) continued resourcing or piloting of structural change

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