

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
EMPLOYMENT EDUCATION & TRAINING
INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE OF TECHNICAL & FURTHER EDUCATION**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Independent Education Union of Australia (IEU) appreciates the opportunity to put its views to the Inquiry into the Role of Institutions of Technical & Further Education being conducted by the House of Representatives Committee on Employment, Education & Training.
- 1.2 The IEU is the federally registered organisation which represents the industrial and professional interests of teachers and school officers in all non-government education institutions across Australia. It has a current membership of approximately 44,000 members.
- 1.3 The IEU and its members have a strong interest in the curriculum, assessment and certification arrangements which exist across the nation and the diverse approaches to prepare young people for further education and for the workforce. Central to these concerns are the role and purpose of schools and their interrelationship with other educational institutions, including TAFE, private providers of post compulsory education and training and universities.
- 1.4 Over the past 7 to 8 years, a considerable body of work has been produced by various education working parties concerning the convergence of general and vocational education and from the 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 their various endeavours throughout life

Within this context, the interrelationships of the role and purpose of schools and of post school institutions such as TAFE and universities require attention.

2. CURRENT CONTEXT - THE DRIVERS OF CHANGE FOR EDUCATION

- 2.1 The restructuring of the Australian economy and industry has resulted in a demand for a more qualified and skilled workforce. The current labour market is characterised by the changing nature of work (including the loss of existing occupations and jobs and the emergence of new occupations and jobs) and the increased demand for multi skilling and increasingly flexible working arrangements.

- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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 broad educational needs of the student population.
- 2.4 Historically, the higher education sector has had a powerful influence upon the senior secondary curriculum and generally the community has placed a higher value on studies at university and on credentials from university. Essentially, this influence has controlled curriculum and assessment in post compulsory education and has acted as an impediment to schools providing what should be equally valued, vocationally oriented courses.
- 2.5 There is an increase in the partnerships between business/industry and training - with industry increasing their commitment to training as an investment and requiring greater workplace delivery.
- 2.6 Educational institutions must take account of the impact of new technologies on the nature of skills required and the delivery of training products and services.
- 2.7 The progressive implementation of government policies at both the federal and state levels has seen an expansion of the education and training market, increased the competitive tendering of public training funds and promoted the expansion of user choice options.
- 2.8 Changes to public policy such as the current government's New Apprenticeship System have resulted in the progressive blurring of the respective roles of schools, TAFE and universities. The introduction of the New Apprenticeship system will see the role of schools expanded to include the delivery of the early levels of apprenticeships and traineeships.

3. 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, retention rates have increased and systems have embarked on major restructuring, 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
- strengthen pathways and relationships with TAFE, universities and other education and training providers

4. HOW DO SCHOOLS VIEW THEIR ROLE

4.1 There are over 300,000 teachers and school officers employed in approximately 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 consensus in the schooling sector does exist on a number of fundamental issues:

4.1.1 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 already;

4.1.2 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;

4.1.3 there is a need and desire for more relevant curriculum, assessment and teaching methodologies in general and for appropriate professional development and resources to this end;

4.1.4 there is consensus that schools need to have broader curriculum offerings, particularly in the vocational area. Over the past 5 years schooling authorities have implemented policy to achieve this outcome;

4.1.5 there is a consensus that all courses should be accredited and articulate into further education and training.

4.2 As a consequence schools have been encouraged to:

4.2.1 become registered providers of accredited vocational education and training courses that equip students with recognised qualifications;

4.2.2 provide programs that articulate with other VET programs;

4.2.3 provide different ways of learning including work based learning;

4.2.4 expand opportunities for students to move into a range of pathways post school;

4.2.5 develop more organisational structures to allow for work based learning or part time work.

5. SOME CURRENT APPROACHES

5.1 Schools and systems have been involved in a range of initiatives which are designed to address the regime of needs in terms of post compulsory schooling. These involve such initiatives as:

5.1.1 structural changes - senior colleges, extended days, school/TAFE campuses;

5.1.2 joint school TAFE initiatives;

5.1.3 broader vocational education offerings, associated accreditation for schools and teachers and credit transfer and articulation arrangements;

5.1.4 industry placement of students and a recognition that schools need to rethink their work organisation arrangements to be able to do this.

6. COMPETING CHALLENGES FOR SCHOOLS

6.1 The IEU has serious concerns regarding the resourcing implications for schools in ensuring that there is quality provision of vocational education.

6.2 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 educational agendas which must be addressed by schools:

- the early years - literacy and numeracy etc.;
- the middle years - appropriate structures, resourcing and pedagogy;
- special needs students;
- changing emphasis on outcomes based education and meeting individual needs;
- greater community involvement, parent participation, interagency approaches in schools.

7. THE ROLE OF TAFE

7.1 As outlined above, the demands of economic reform within the global economy and the drive for a more highly skilled workforce has given strong impetus for micro reform of the various sectors of the education industry. The VET agenda has been a significant driver for such an approach.

7.2 While strategies have been developed for promoting seamless education and training and there is a blurring of the roles of schools, TAFE and higher education, the IEU supports the existence of an independent VET

sector aimed at servicing industry needs supported by a strong, well resourced TAFE system.

- 7.3 The IEU believes that issues of access and equity are of fundamental importance and that these issues are addressed by a comprehensive TAFE network across the nation. While some students have accessed dual accredited courses delivered by private providers, the numbers are relatively small because of the cost to schools in terms of resources and coordination. Further, issues of quality assurance in relation to private providers have concerned school authorities.
- 7.4 The IEU believes that there is strong support and credibility within the community, particularly the parent community, for the TAFE sector. It is the largest provider of technical and further education, has a range of quality assurance policies and practices in place and while there are different structural arrangements existing in different states and territories, well developed infrastructure and a reservoir of corporate knowledge about further education and training exists within the sector.
- 7.5 The IEU believes it would be detrimental to student learning needs and to the integrity of the VET agenda if the TAFE system was to become reduced and increasingly marginalised by public policy which seeks to privatise this sector of education or to jeopardise the certainty of its funding base through expanded competitive tendering.
- 7.6 The IEU acknowledges the validity of criticism (including from some non-government schools and systems) concerning an inflexible and slow response from TAFE to various aspects of the training reform agenda. Nevertheless, on balance the union believes that organisational models for TAFE colleges exist within states which provide for best practice delivery of the training agenda. Cooperative alliances between clusters of TAFE Colleges, including metropolitan and rural have developed strong mutual training partnership arrangements. Schools and universities could be included in such cooperative alliances. This would have the effect of:
- strengthening partnership arrangements with other education institutions and with industry; strengthening resource utilisation and sharing;
 - enhancing access and equity for those who are disadvantaged through socio economical, circumstance or geographic isolation;
 - sharing of specialist staff resources and enhancing flexible delivery arrangements.
- 7.7 The IEU believes it is important to focus and strengthen the respective roles of schools, TAFE and higher education, which does not preclude the possibility of cooperative alliances and partnership arrangements between institutions within the sectors.

It would recognise that while some overlap and blurring of the roles of the sectors occurs, there exists the legitimate core business of each of the sectors.