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Dear Mr Firth

Submission to Victoria's review into vocational and applied learning in senior secondary schooling

The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review into vocational and applied learning pathways in Senior Secondary School. We have also appreciated the opportunity to work directly with you and the review team through our membership to the Reference Group.

As Victoria's leading business organisation, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Victorian Chamber) informs and services more than 15,000 members, customers and clients across the state, encompassing all industry sectors and spanning small, medium and large-sized businesses.

Our submission has been informed by input from both members of the Victorian Chamber and clients of Apprenticeship Support Australia captured from two employer roundtables and a survey of 179 employers conducted between February and April 2020.

Detailed information on these survey findings, including a breakdown by industry sectors, business size, location, and the number of apprentices/trainees employed can be found in Appendix 1. Qualitative feedback from employers obtained through the survey and roundtable consultations is provided in Appendix 2.

Member feedback confirms the important role the Vocational and Applied Learning (VCAL) system plays, not only in equipping young people for entry into the world of work, but providing them with the functional competencies (literacy, numeracy, technology skills and 'soft' skills like effective communication, interpersonal and self-management) needed to participate in the economy and society more widely.

Our members have told us they consider the current VCAL design is generally working well and possesses several strengths. However, they also consider it could be improved through reforms to the certificate framework, the curriculum, delivery support, industry work experience, workforce development, funding and promotion.

Our submission discusses these issues in detail and makes several recommendations to strengthen student, school and employer engagement in VCAL programs, including VET in Schools (VETiS) and School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs). We are working closely with members to understand the reforms to VCAL that will support economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and will provide a separate submission to you on these matters.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission with you in further detail.

Yours sincerely

Paul Guerra
Chief Executive

1. Vocational and applied learning is important to Victoria

As the review issues paper notes, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is unique in the context of Australia. It provides a relatively flexible way of engaging students in vocational learning. Vocational Education and Training delivered to school students (VETiS), helps build students' technical skills and understand industries and occupations in ways that suit their learning styles.

Work-based learning models like VCAL will be even more important in the future as technology-driven changes to the 'way we do things' need to be quickly transmitted across industries and throughout workplaces. The fast-changing world requires flexible and applied ways of learning so young people can lay strong foundations for their careers and then build further skills and knowledge in order to participate in new and changing industries.

In Victoria, the current design of the VCAL system exhibits several strengths. These include program flexibility which caters for a broad spectrum of student abilities and interests, a focus on work readiness, dedicated VCAL spaces and resources in schools that support the delivery of a high quality VCAL program, and ongoing efforts to build coherency between the VCAL strands, work placement and VET.

2. However, further reforms are needed to strengthen VCAL

Feedback from Victorian Chamber members points to a wide variation in experience with VCAL and the quality of programs. While some schools deliver well-operating and highly regarded vocational pathway programs, other school's programs are less successful.

Not all employers, students, parents and other members of the community are clear about the purpose of vocational and applied learning in schools and how it prepares students for life after school. As a result, perceptions towards VCAL are often negative and in some instances, this extends to VETiS and SBATs. These perceptions can affect employer involvement in VCAL, student decisions about their school and post-school pathways, as well as resource decisions made by schools.

The objectives of vocational and applied learning

Vocational and applied learning serves multiple purposes including student retention, engagement or reengagement, inclusion and supporting post school transitions. These purposes need not be in tension. Our education system has multiple objectives and these broad objectives are the same across academic, vocational and applied learning programs.

The Victorian Chamber considers that the overarching objectives of secondary school education, including VCAL and VCE, should be:

- To ensure students have the skills and capabilities to meet the current and future needs of business. Students need to be confident that the resources they are allocating to their studies will result in access to rewarding job prospects and real employment outcomes.
- To give employers confidence that Victoria's education and training system is providing students (including those engaged in higher education and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships) with the appropriate knowledge and skills to increase the productivity and efficiency of their business.
- To equip people with the functional competencies that enable their participation in the economy and society more widely. This includes minimum levels of literacy, numeracy and technology skills, as well as effective communication, interpersonal and self-management skills.

All stakeholders need to be able to trust the quality of vocational and applied learning. Successive reviews have

confirmed that students need better career advice and information to support their decision making, and a genuine choice of pathways that best match their strengths and interests.¹

Employers need to be sure there is a pipeline of talent to give them confidence to invest in Victoria. There is a need to design a clear, consistent, credible and high-quality applied learning system that improves access to, and transitions between, school, post-secondary education and work.

3. Design changes are needed

3.1. The dual certificate framework contributes to negative perceptions of vocational and applied learning

We asked members about their views on the equivalence or superiority of VCAL or VCE and their preference for either of these qualifications when looking to employ a secondary school leaver in an entry level position.

While employer feedback acknowledged many examples of high quality VCAL programs within the existing, dual certificate (VCE and VCAL) framework, feedback indicates a strong preference to moving to a single certificate framework. A single certificate would signal equal prioritisation of the two existing certificates, improve the connectedness between VCE and VCAL and improve perceptions and minimise the stigma around vocational and applied learning pathways.

Members also told us there could be merit in developing separate pathways within a single certificate. Under this approach the single certificate would retain the existing VCE pathway and create a new vocational pathway based on a redesigned VCAL certificate. VCE students would be able to take some VCAL units, which they cannot currently do. VCE will be awarded for completion of either pathway.

By keeping the pathways separate the system would be signalling the importance of having high quality vocational and applied learning pathways, while being less disruptive to the VCE. However, members acknowledged there would be a risk that the vocational pathway could be seen as VCAL under another name.

Recommendation 1: A single certificate framework with separate pathways should be introduced to secondary school education

To ensure all students have the best preparation for their future, the Victorian Chamber supports the development of a high quality, single certificate framework that reduces bifurcation into a dominant 'academic' curriculum and an (under-valued) 'alternative' vocational curriculum.

3.2. The current VCAL curriculum does not reflect the combination of skills needed in the modern work environment

Future labour market needs do not divide neatly into knowledge based or manual skills categories. Many growth industries increasingly require higher skill levels and involve more cognitive work. Already Australian workers are spending less time on routine and manual tasks and more time on complex activities that require a high degree of creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, interpretation of information, personal interaction and empathy.

This is significantly blurring the lines between what kind of learning is needed for which jobs and where it should be acquired. We know that at the tertiary level, study and qualifications will become increasingly integrated across vocational and higher education.

¹ For example: Rebalance and Relaunch, Supporting Victoria's economy by enhancing apprenticeship and traineeship pathways as a mechanism for skilling the future workforce. Office of the Victorian Skills Commissioner, October 2017, pages 15-17.

Recommendation 2: A more integrated VCAL curriculum is needed to provide students with a more diverse suite of soft and technical skills that meet the needs of industry, now and into the future

Every student should be engaged with a broad, rigorous, high quality senior curriculum that combines academic, vocational and applied learning in ways tailored to meet their needs, aptitudes and aspirations.

3.3. VETiS do not offer enough work placement or on-the-job training

VET offerings in schools do not provide enough work placement or on-the-job training when compared to standard post-school VET delivery and employers often do not see them as being sufficiently work integrated or as providing authentic workplace or career exploration. The courses chosen by schools can create post-school employment issues that limit options for students such as qualifying the students for second year apprentice wages when they have not had the necessary work experience to be productive, or disqualifying them from access to a different qualification at the same level if their preferences change.

Many young people do not develop valuable skills that arise from work until they are adults (over 18), by which time the cost of their employment is at or close to adult rates where they will be competing against job seekers with much more experience. This lack of work experience has hindered successful transitions from education to work and has made it all the more important for young people while they are still at school to acquire skills needed in the workplace so they can make a successful transition into the workforce when they are ready.

All students should have work experience before they finish schooling as 'schools alone cannot foster all of the skills and capabilities that young people need to find success in work and life'.² Casual and part-time work undertaken by school students are valuable sources of learning and can have a meaningful impact on a student's pathways, aspirations and successful transition, whether to work or further education.

Exposure to the world of work provides opportunities for students to build connections with professionals outside their usual family networks. Varied opportunities to engage with the world of work can expand young people's aspirations beyond familiar settings.³ As our members have said:

On the job work experience trumps any in school training prior to commencing full time employment. Kids need to ensure they experience hands on work to understand if they are fully interested in the field and the wide spectrum of work a plumbing career can offer.

It's more about giving the kids a chance to do work experience so they work out what they like. Then as an employer you have a person that wants to be there.

Recommendation 3: Work experience should be compulsory for all secondary school students

The Victorian Chamber recommends more should be done to encourage school students to undertake part time, holiday and volunteer work, and to assist them in finding suitable work placements.

3.4. The qualification options offered in VETiS are too narrow

Feedback from members suggests that the programs offered through VETiS are narrowly preparing students for work in specific occupations that may be contracting or radically affected by automation in the next 10

² Torii, 2018 in Van Dyke, N., Jackson, J., & Anderson, M. (2019). *Student-focused senior secondary schooling*. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne.

³ As above

years, rather than providing them with broader exposure to an industry and the kinds of preparation that industry requires.

Among the employers we surveyed and asked to review the list of 2020 VET programs for senior secondary students, almost a third said either none of the programs offered are relevant to their industry, or that the programs offered, while relevant, would be enough to secure entry level employment in their industry.

Recommendation 4: Schools need to provide a wider range of qualifications in industries or skills areas that currently not represented

Recognising that resource restrictions on schools could limit school's capacity to do this, a region-wide model could be implemented where schools could partner to offer a wider range of qualifications.

3.5. School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships are not adequately understood or supported by industry

One of the reasons VET in schools enrolments have plateaued is the low awareness among employers of School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs), including models like Head Start that enables students to take an extra year to complete their VCE or VCAL in order to spend more time in paid, on-the-job training.

This was confirmed by our survey results that showed awareness of the new Head Start model of apprenticeships and traineeships for school students was very low. Only 21 percent of respondent employers said they are aware of the new Head Start model, while 78 percent said they are not aware of it or are not sure. Members told us:

We would like more information on this program. Have no awareness of its existence. I have previously approached local schools directly asking for any interested VCAL students in and have had no response.

Head Start needs to provide the service. I potentially have job roles but Head Start couldn't provide any students

While many respondents (45 percent) indicated they would consider employing school-based apprentices or trainees, many remain hesitant for several reasons, including:

- VCAL program rigidities with inflexible scheduling that does not release students for the duration required by employers
- Financial barriers and the cost (and opportunity cost) of devoting labour and resources to supervise students in on-the-job training
- Previous poor experience with SBATs or young employees
- A preference that apprentices or trainees to finish school first
- A lack of demand from students

The Victorian Chamber strongly supports the Head Start model as it allows students to take an extra year to complete their VCE or VCAL and to spend more time in important, paid, on-the-job training. Extending this approach to facilitate a third year of senior schooling for more students, could open more exciting opportunities. Instead of a crowded curriculum, it could allow depth in certain areas, as well as work integrated learning opportunities.

Recommendation 5: Improve awareness of SBATs and the Head Start program throughout industry

Schools need to more effectively engage with communities, employers and industry to increase awareness of SBAT opportunities. This includes better promotion of VCAL to both students and employers and investing in the capacity of schools to interact with employers and business to create more VET in school pathways for students.

Recommendation 6: Schools need to offer greater flexibility to accommodate work schedules and support both employers and students to meet their requirements.

This includes increasing the flexibility of timetabling within schools to allow more days at work.

4. Better delivery support is also needed

The work integrated and entrepreneurial learning described earlier needs to be driven by entrepreneurial teaching. Research has identified three key enabling elements:

- A network structure exposing students and teachers to other schooling practices, ideas and experiences, which affirmed, supported and challenged them
- A school leadership culture that supports experimentation and an openness to learning from mistakes
- Teachers with the dispositions to enable and support entrepreneurial learning.⁴

The Victorian Chamber recognises schools as system changers and would like to see schools supported with recognition, time and additional funding to enable diversity in learning networks, the documenting and sharing of good practice, and strengthening the knowledge base with more research and evaluations. For example, to better establish how schools cultivate the dispositions and teacher skillsets that are crucial for entrepreneurial, product-oriented learning. This has implications for initial and ongoing teacher education and how students and teachers are assessing the outcomes of entrepreneurial learning.

More broadly, time must be made within the school curriculum for teachers to connect with students' interests and current levels of attainment. They must have time to design learning activities that spark curiosity and intrinsic interest in learning and understanding.

4.1. VETiS is not adequately funded

Hands-on VET courses delivered by schools and external providers are more expensive for schools and for students than traditional academic offerings. VET for secondary school student programs are not always resourced according to their needs and are typically costly for schools to implement. Funding inequalities are a systemic factor that limits student choices and the fees charged by schools for VET intensify socio-economic inequalities, impacting most heavily on the poorest students.

Funding for VET is also at its lowest level in more than a decade, making it difficult for VET providers to sustain high course standards. Current funding models do not encourage VET providers to undertake long-term planning in respect of staffing, infrastructure and other support resources, which compromises their ability to engage and collaborate with schools.⁵

⁴ The Mitchell Institute (2017) *Paradigm Shifters: Entrepreneurial Learning in Schools - Key points for policy makers* <http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Fact-sheet-for-policy-makers.pdf>

⁵ Van Dyke, N., & Jackson, J. (2019). *Unlocking the value of VET for school students: Submission to the Review of VET for School Students in South Australia*. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne.

Recommendation 7: VETiS funding needs to increase

Policies and funding (including those relating to pricing and subsidy) must be developed that recognise different costs of delivery and encourage adequate provision in both metropolitan and regional settings. Facilitating synergies, cooperation and the sharing of resources between secondary, VET and higher education providers should also be pursued to reduce the costs of provision and increase the available offerings of courses and units.

4.2. Teaching workforce reforms will enhance student outcomes

The substantial differences between the pedagogy underpinning VET and that of other VCE subjects makes delivery by teachers outside specialist schools both complex and demanding. For teachers, the need to maintain industry currency is essential, but need not be as demanding as the current Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) requirement that teachers update their qualifications whenever an updated industry package is approved by this regulator.

Similarly, the delivery model of Certificate IV in Training and Assessment model could also be reviewed as this model is making it increasingly difficult to attract skilled and qualified trade and professional people to work in TAFE and the wider VET sector. The timing of courses (evening versus day), time commitment and expense needed to complete a full course of study can be prohibitive.

Other options should be developed. For example, the creation of a formal, short industry presenter option that would enable training to be delivered by those in industry without supervision. This option would be attractive to all types of training providers, from TAFE to industry-based organisations, and help to ensure a robust and knowledgeable workforce.

School timetabling is a real and practical constraint on student pathways, as subject combinations must be tailored to fit the availability of classrooms, resources and teaching staff. It is especially limiting in small schools and in circumstances where students need to travel to access preferred subject choices. However, new technologies are disrupting how young people use space and time, offering new possibilities for rethinking and reorganising the school timetable to increase flexibility.

4.3. Industry engagement and employer support is inconsistent across schools

School-industry partnerships are vital to facilitating project-based learning, strengthening pathways and providing greater opportunities for students to combine the world of work with their schooling.⁶ Students, schools and business can all benefit from school-industry partnerships. Students benefit through enhanced career aspirations, work readiness and skills development; schools benefit through opportunities to offer innovative curriculum delivery and improved student engagement and retention; and business benefits through developing young people who may become potential employees.

Unfortunately, schools often do not understand the needs and requirements of industry, and similarly industry is not always aware of how they can fit into the education system. Stronger input from schools is necessary to ensure that work experiences are meaningful. Stronger input from industry is needed to ensure students are gaining the skills business needs now, and into the future.⁷

⁶ Atkinson, G., National Centre for Vocational Education and Research, 2016, *Work-based learning and work-integrated learning: fostering engagement with employers*, p 2

⁷ Torii, 2018 in Van Dyke, N., Jackson, J., & Anderson, M. (2019). *Student-focused senior secondary schooling*. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne.

Recommendation 8: Increase incentives for employers and industry to engage with VET in schools

There needs to be more engagement and incentives for employers and industry to engage with VET and schools; to value and enter into work integrated learning, training and employment arrangements to develop skills with a high productivity value across the economy. For example, under current federal government funding arrangements, employers of school-based apprentices and mature apprentices (45 years or older) can only potentially claim additional payments of \$1,500 per apprentice. An employer of an apprentice in a rural or regional area undertaking a Certificate III or IV on the National Skills Needs list can only potentially receive an additional payment of \$1,000. The amounts are considerably lower than the payment of \$4,000 for an apprentice in an area of Additional Identified Skills Shortage.

5. New approaches are needed to measure student outcomes

Over 30 years of research into the world's highest performing school systems⁸ has found that an important feature of high-performing systems is their expectation that every student will *achieve a specified standard of attainment* on a common, core curriculum.⁹ No less important in high-performing countries are 'the strategies used to keep all students on track'. Teachers are expected to 'closely monitor their students' progress... and to add time and other resources if they start to fall behind'.

This aligns with the opinions expressed by many employers:

Make the students confident, ensure the teachers are there to support them in class work. Nobody is the same, some can learn faster than another. Teachers should have the ability to find out the students that are falling behind and find time to help them.

The dominance of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a frequently cited concern in senior secondary education.¹⁰ Ample evidence exists that a narrow focus on ATAR scores as the defining outcome of schooling has adverse consequences. Academically oriented school performance measures are failing to provide an accurate picture of what matters for many students, their families and communities.¹¹

For example, a student who thrives in a school-based apprenticeship might transition to a full apprenticeship mid-way through Year 12. This can be a positive outcome for the student and their employer but be represented as a 'failure' in terms of school performance data. Special schools that transition high proportions of their students direct from school to work are setting their students up for independent futures, but this is invisible in most measures of school success.

The challenge for Victoria is to shift the focus from 'sorting' students on the basis of how much they learn in a fixed period of time, to holding every student to the same high proficiency standard, recognising that individuals will require different kinds and amounts of support and different lengths of time to reach achieve their learning objectives.

This is particularly the case for literacy and numeracy and the foundational skills required to function effectively in the workplace. Employers need to accurately gauge whether a new apprentice or trainee possesses

⁸ as measured by international surveys such as the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the IEA's Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

⁹ Tucker, M (2019) *Leading high performance school systems: lessons from the world's best*.

¹⁰ Pilcher, S. and Torii, K. (2018) *Crunching the number: exploring the use and usefulness of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)*. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne.

¹¹ Van Dyke, N., Jackson, J., & Anderson, M. (2019). *Student-focused senior secondary schooling*. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne.

adequate literacy and numeracy skills and what level of further training may be required. For this reason, minimum standards for literacy and numeracy for all school leavers must relate to the standards required in the workplace using international standards, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), as the benchmark.

Recommendation 9: Meaningful measures, beyond ATAR, must be developed to evaluate success for students, schools and programs.

They should include economic participation, through work or other social enterprise; active civil society contributions and potentially students' sense of identity, wellbeing and connection to culture or country.

6. Better promotion is needed to reinforce the value of VCAL during career advice

Research with over 4,000 Australian young people found only 16 percent of students, on average, have a good to strong understanding of pathways such as VET, apprenticeships and traineeships.¹² Many young people felt they were not being provided with a deep understanding of all available post-school options and were simply being pushed to pursue university, with 46 percent of young people claiming they faced 'too much' pressure from their school to enter university and only 10 percent saying they faced no pressure at all.¹³

Recommendation 10: Provision of comprehensive, unbiased and up-to-date career advice is needed

An important aspect of providing this career advice to young people is to put in place strategies that encourage schools and careers advisors to work more collaboratively with industry not just at the local level but with industry associations so as to better understand what jobs are in the market and what skills are needed.

7. Concluding comments

Member feedback confirms the important role the VCAL system plays, not only in equipping young people for entry into the world of work, but providing them with the functional competencies needed to participate in the economy and society more widely.

Our members consider the current VCAL design is generally working well and possesses several strengths. However, for VCAL and all its stakeholders, the challenge is to establish a culture within schools, industry and the wider community where VCAL is seen as an alternate, but equally valid and important pathway to the VCE. Student and employer successes must be celebrated throughout the community through clear and consistent messaging around VCAL, how it works and what is required for a successful outcome.

This review represents an exciting opportunity for Victoria to refine the delivery of its VCAL system and the Victorian Chamber would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission with you in further detail.

¹² Shipley, B. and Stublely, W. (2018) After the ATAR II: Understanding how Gen Z make decisions about their future, Year13, Australia

¹³ Year 13 2019, After the ATAR II, <https://year13.com.au/articles/after-the-atar-ii>

Appendix 1 – Skilling Victoria’s Secondary School Students Employer Survey Results

Primary Industry or Sector respondents involved in

Industry Sector	Percentage
Construction	34
Other services	19
Electricity, gas, water and waste	16
Manufacturing	12
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	5
Accommodation and food services	4.5
Retail Trade	3
Professional, scientific and technical services	2
Health care and social assistance	1
Information, media and Telecommunications	1
Rental, hiring and real estate services	1
Education and training	0.5
Transport, postal and warehousing	0.5
Arts and recreation services	0.5
Total	100%

Business size of respondents

84% are small businesses (<25FTE)

11% are medium businesses (25 – 100 FTE)

5% are large businesses (>100 FTE)

Respondent Location – Approximately 18 respondents gave multiple locations

110 (48%) Melbourne

14 (6%) Bellarine/Barwon

13 (6%) Mornington Peninsula

11 (5%) Gippsland

7 (3%) Great South Coast

8 (3.5%) Central Highlands

9 (4%) Goulburn

7 (3%) Wimmera Southern Mallee

8 (3.5%) Mallee

10 (4%) Ovens Murray

12 (5%) Loddon Campaspe

18 (8%) Other

Employing young people between the ages of 15 and 25 (179 responses)

158 (88%) do, while 22 (12%) don't.

Employing apprentices and/or trainees (167 responses)

141 (84%) do, while 26 (16%) don't

Of those who do:

- 53 (38%) employ 1 apprentice/trainee
- 66 (47%) employ 2-5 apprentices/trainees
- 10 (7%) employ 6-10 apprentices/trainees
- 3 (2%) employ 11-20 apprentices/trainees
- 6 (4%) employ more than 20 apprentices/trainees

Awareness of new Head Start model for school-based apprenticeships/traineeships (167 responses)

35 (21%) are aware of the new Head Start model for apprenticeships/traineeships for school students, while the majority 130 (78%) are not aware of it or are not sure.

Employ school-based apprentices/trainees or Head Start apprentices/trainees (167 responses)

- 29 (17%) employ
- 128 (77%) do not employ
- 10 (6%) don't know

Barriers to employing school-based or Head Start apprentices/trainees (167 responses)

- 75 (45%) said they would be comfortable employing school-based/head start apprentices/trainees
- 46 (27.5%) said they were not aware of school-based/head start apprenticeships/traineeships
- 46 (27.5%) said something prevented them from employing school-based or Head Start apprentices/trainees

When looking to employ a secondary school leaver in an entry level position

- 132 (73%) have no preference, if they have one of the two
- 30 (17%) prefer a VCAL graduate
- 18 (10%) prefer a VCE graduate

After looking at the list of 2020 VET Programs for Senior Secondary Students (137 Respondents)

- 91 (66%) said YES, both the certificate II and III options would be enough to secure entry level employment in their industry upon completion
- 8 (6%) said ONLY the certificate III options would be enough to secure entry level employment in their industry upon completion
- 16 (12%) said neither the certificate II nor III options would be enough to secure entry level employment in their industry
- 22 (16%) said none of the programs offered are relevant to their industry

Familiarity with the term 'Structured Workplace Learning' (SWL) (137 Respondents)

75 (55%) are familiar with the term, while 62 (45%) were not.

Participation in structured workplace learning programs for students

- 37 (25%) participate in SWL programs for Senior Secondary School - e.g. work experience or supplying projects for project-based subjects
- 23 (15%) participate in SWL programs for VET Students - e.g. compulsory work placements, internships

- 89 (60%) do not participate in any structured workplace learning programs

Perceived benefits to the business or organisation of participating in structured workplace learning programs (268 responses in 137 results)*

- Ability to recruit future employees - 91 (66%)
- Give back to the industry/profession – 52 (38%)
- Access to new thinking and new ideas – 19 (14%)
- Integration with the education sector and emerging research and practices 28 (20%)
- The ability to refresh the organisation – 15 (11%)
- Aligns with corporate responsibilities – 15 (11%)
- Improve the organisation's skills and competitiveness – 13 (9%)
- Other – 16 (12%)
- 19 (14%) don't see any benefits of structured workplace learning programs to their business

* The percentages do not tally as respondents could select multiple benefits.

Interest in supporting more senior school students/leavers or young into work by providing*:

- Head start (school based) apprenticeships/traineeships – 55 (40%)
- Structured workplace learning experiences in partnership with local school/s, TAFE, RTO or industry association – 77 (56%)
- Mentoring – 42 (31%)
- None – 32 (23%)

*percentages above do not tally as respondents could select multiple options (206 responses in 137 results)

Appendix 2 – Qualitative feedback from employers

The objectives of vocational and applied learning

- *Everyone has different strengths in different areas, some are more hands on than others and vice versa. Doesn't mean the intelligence in an academic classroom is superior to someone in a wood working class.*
- *Some students aren't academic but are more inclined to develop with hands on learning.*
- *VCAL is just an alternate way of completing VCE dependent on the individual.*
- *Different people have different ways of learning.*
- *General education at that age probably more important than trade based secondary education.*
- *Trade should be tertiary.*
- *I think it's good for kids to have a good range of knowledge as it helps them in the long run of life.*
- *So long as the training is correctly delivered and the future apprentice has committed to finishing their schooling, we find they are better equipped for the future and their overall growth in maturity sees them more confident, on completion, to be workforce ready and work alongside other adult peers.*
- *I feel if they have put in the effort to complete school, they are showing signs of dedication.*
- *If you can't last at school until year 12, then you have a much less chance of lasting through an apprenticeship.*
- *Students don't require vocational training. Rather, they require what education used to provide: the ability to read and write, communication and numeracy skills.*
- *When employing I will never employ anyone under the age of 21 or without some experience, younger people have no communication skills, no drive or self-motivation, no willingness to learn, seem disinterested they change career paths frequently and are too busy worrying about their phone. I speak from experience as I have tried three different VCAL students. Yet my 23-year-old VCE 3rd year apprentice is the top of his class according the College he attends.*
- *Only certificate II in something that they enjoy, trying to make them prepare at such a young age is not really a great idea as they have yet to experience life and be able to make an informed decision.*

Design Changes Required

- *VCAL maths is not good enough to be an electrician*
- *VCE would have exposed the person to an academic approach to learning. This ultimately helps their personal skills of communication with a possible higher level of literacy and numeracy.*
- *The subjects offered to VCAL students are often inferior in content and not relevant to industry requirements and future directional need of growth in industry. For example, VCAL students are forced by inadequate timetabling into basic maths and English subjects. Carpentry students should be completing specialized maths appropriate for future development, including accounting and technical mathematical areas that suit the career. English should be broadened to include looking at contracts and reading practical guides such as contracts and manuals, etc.*
- *We need kids coming out with a better level of maths. Otherwise they can't handle the electrical apprenticeship schooling. If you look at the current curriculum there is a very limited pathway into trades and kids are not being taught any hand skills. This results in them being passed over for jobs or getting a job and injuring themselves trying to do work the wrong way.*
- *Technology is out-pacing school-based learning.*
- *VCAL isn't helping students to get a proper head start in their field... therefore I believe they are best benefited by achieving their VCE and either undertaking an SBAT or starting their apprenticeship after they finish.*
- *VCAL is good for students heading for the trades and or students who are not making the grades (unfortunately usually because they can't be bothered). We need young people who are prepared to think and solve problems (not ask the teacher for the answer)*

- *VCAL is more of an asset from my point of view if the student is applied and keen to learn. Too many VCE students don't do well so settle for a trade I feel which is not what industry needs.*
- *VCAL schools need to be serious about properly equipping these students with the right skills, not being a stream for those students who the school believes will not achieve a good ATAR.*

A more integrated curriculum

- *Interviewing skills. CV writing. Working in an adult environment. Communication skills*
- *Ability to problem solve and not looking for someone to give the answers.*
- *Life skills - they often come with an education but no resilience or maturity within the work environment.*
- *They need to be taught how to think for themselves*
- *I don't think qualifications in any field are always necessary, student need to be taught life skills, work ethic, and what's required by others, skills will come later at training.*
- *Play sports. Be interested in making and improving things.*
- *Have one or more casual jobs and be reliable at turning up to school.*
- *Working in teams and conflict resolution*
- *Time management, diary and priority management, problem solving skills as well as Skills in Xero, MYOB basic would be beneficial as well as how to format basic letters/emails and phone manners.*

Work experience

- *On the job work experience trumps any in school training prior to commencing full time employment. Kids need to ensure they experience hands on work to understand if they are fully interested in the field and the wide spectrum of work a plumbing career can offer.*
- *It's more about giving the kids a chance to do work experience so they work out what they like.*
- *Then as an employer you have a person that wants to be there.*

School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships

- *Would like more information on this program. Have no awareness of its existence. I have previously approached local schools directly asking for any interested VCAL students in and have had no response.*
- *Head Start need to provide the service. I potentially have job roles but Head Start couldn't provide any students.*
- *The program is good. In 2017 I had students on work experience for 8 months.*
- *In 2018 we then changed their employment to school-based apprenticeships for 1 year while completing VCAL*
- *In 2019 upon completion of VCAL their employment went full time and in 2020 they are currently full-time and will become third year apprentices in early April*
- *I have utilized this feeder system and it is a great system.*
- *I have put three through school based and it has worked fine.*
- *High cost. High risk with OH&S. No thanks.*
- *The schools I have approached don't understand the system.*
- *Unfortunately offers that our business has made to schools offering to take on work experience or VCAL students has fallen on deaf ears as we get no requests.*
- *We have found that this does not work very well as our apprentices are required to travel for school and we feel they did not work as well when we tried it, nor did they learn as well.*
- *Their learning at trade school is too fast for work they do in the salon and is completely out of balance.*
- *They and us need more time together than one day a fortnight on job.*
- *Had one school based but was difficult to schedule workday around school commitments - no consistency.*
- *We require our staff to travel and are sometime working on projects longer than 5 days*

- *Have had them previously and they really are not dedicated to learning. More just to get out of school.*
- *School based is crap, there is no continuity in the training, and it accounts for too much time in the apprenticeship*
- *No Driver's Licence; require more supervision; difficulty with staff scheduling if only at work 1 or 2 days a week.*
- *Many young people do not have the persistence to go through an 11-month traineeship (Cert III in outdoor recreation) and often waste our time and give up.*
- *It costs my business \$36,000.00 in lost earnings over the four years that I sign an apprentice up for. Without a contract, indentured system, no thanks. I train them and they go straight to government infrastructure projects and I have no way of getting the training costs back.*
- *Has become too expensive for little or no return, as soon as they are trained, they want their own business or work in the mines for big cash.*
- *Everyone should complete a VCE before starting an apprenticeship or traineeship in a trade.*
- *The minimum age for an apprentice should be at least 19yrs.*
- *Twice I have tried to use VCAL and the education system has failed myself and the students.*

Better promotion

- *Our industry has seen a decline in applicants for apprenticeships over the years and I believe if we can create a chain of communication between School - Employer - GoTAFE (or similar) would create a path worth walking for our young job seekers.*
- *Schools need to be more supportive of school-based apprenticeship or traineeships. We had a lot of opposition.*
- *We have a major shortage of young people entering our industry (Listed Skills Shortage) as students are not educated about our industry as a pathway.*
- *Improve linkages between schools and employers, provide schools with equal incentives for getting students into work and training as not all students are suited to completing year 12 and then going on to uni. As the mother of a 22 and 18-year-old, I know that this was the only focus of both their separate schools, with no support provided if uni was not a suitable pathway, as was the case for both of my kids. Both successfully completed VCE and were offered places in courses they didn't want to do but were forced by their schools to apply for. One is now a Cert III Commercial Cookery trainee at TAFE, something he could have done at school if given better pathways. The other is working full time in a junior administration role that didn't require Year 12 completion.*
- *Trades in general need to be given a higher profile with students. It's no longer an area for less educated people only.*
- *We are finding it difficult to find anyone who wants to work in our industry.*
- *Perhaps the schools should be more active in the community discussing these roles and finding a fit for students who want to engage in the program.*

More flexibility

- *I am finding that although the schools do support the programme, they often are making it harder for the students to complete all that is required at school and often request that the student must attend school on "work" days to complete activities.*
- *School needs to communicate better with workplace and ensure students time is consistent.*
- *Ask the schools to be more flexible and work more effectively with the employer and the training provider.*
- *Students should be working on the job 2 days a week (rather than one) and at TAFE for one. The schoolwork that they complete should relate directly to the field they intend to work in. Our apprentice felt like they didn't really do any 'work' that was beneficial for the trade.*
- *There seems to be a long line of people and paperwork that needs to be done (teething problems) as these kids are here to work, I would think treating them as a working adult and not a kid in line at school*

could help. As we have tried this on site before and the kids seem to develop better with giving them real life responsibilities and not paperwork that they find to be more homework.

More financial support and incentives for employers:

- *Make the benefits to employers easier and clearer to understand and what the requirements are in terms of paying TAFE and books clearer also. When my apprentice finished his schooling, I was up for a lot of cost I was never aware of prior to taking him on so a lot more clarification around that would be good too.*
- *SBAT is a very hard area to research for all parties involved. We found it very difficult to get answers from the school, our network provider and fair work regarding any questions we had. It is not a clear topic, and there is no single resource that supports employers or employees through the process. Because SBAT kids are not eligible for a concession card school fees are higher, and employers are required to pay for these under the current award. Given these kids can't drive and make limited impacts to the business for the first 2 years it is not often an attractive option for employers... It really could be if it was modelled slightly differently.*
- *Cut the red tape to take on apprentices and lower the cost or subsidise the cost of apprenticeship schooling. Very expensive for small businesses to pay and so less likely to take on apprentices.*
- *How about having something for the employer at the end, example would be the trainee to stay on for a period after training complete. Also take the responsibility of placing these students taken away from the teachers and given to someone that understands how the workplace works in the real world.*
- *Transfer some of the money away from the schools and in support of on-the-job training supported by a school-based on-line system for theory ONLY. But start paying business for the training.*
- *It costs my business \$36,000.00 in lost earnings over the four years that I sign an apprentice up for. Without a contract, indentured system, no thanks. I train them and they go straight to government infrastructure projects and I have no way of getting the training costs back.*