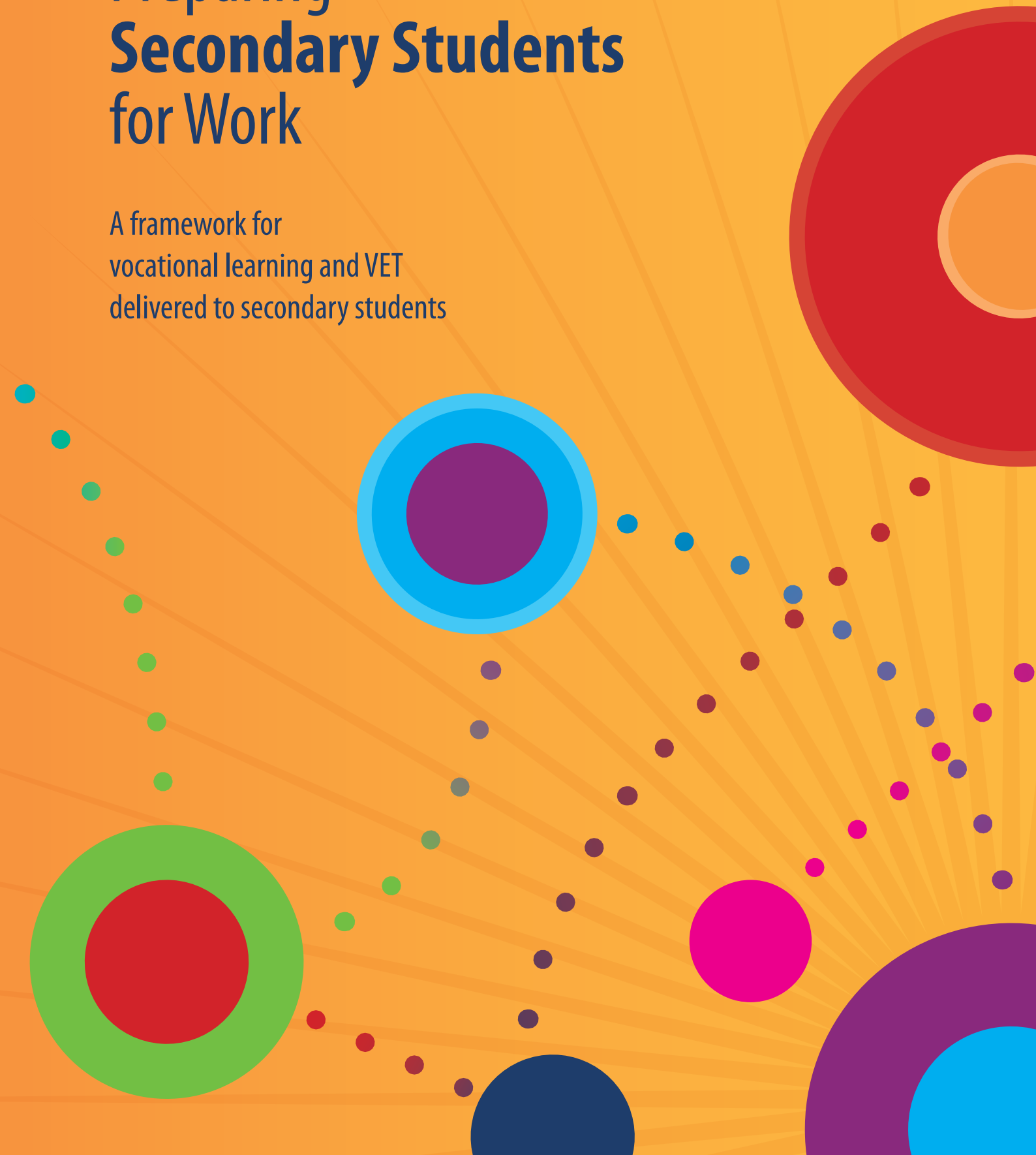
Education Council

Preparing **Secondary Students** for Work

A framework for vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students



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GLOSSARY

ACACA (Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities) is the national body for the chief executives of the statutory bodies in the Australian states and territories and New Zealand responsible for senior secondary certificates of education.

Accredited courses are developed to meet training needs that are not addressed by existing training packages. They are accredited by VET regulators and comply with national and state quality assurance requirements.

Current policy specifies that accredited courses should not duplicate coverage of a training package qualification but allow for a combination of 'enterprise units of competency' (developed by the course owner) and/or training package units of competency. Accredited courses may also include 'modules' that are not competency based.

Under an auspice arrangement, training and/or assessment is undertaken by a school, while a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) issues the qualification or Statement of Attainment.

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is the national policy for regulated qualifications in the Australian education and training system. It incorporates the quality assured qualifications from each education and training sector into a single comprehensive national qualifications framework.

Boards of studies is the term used in this document to describe the statutory bodies in the states and territories responsible for senior secondary certificates of education, including the recognition of VET in those certificates. Related terms include curriculum and assessment authorities and ACACA agencies.

Career education describes the range of strategies or programs in schools that support career development through learning and development, and activities such as work experience and employer visits. Career advice involves the provision of information, advice and guidance by a qualified adviser in a oneonone or small group setting. Career development enables students to acquire the knowledge and develop the skills and capabilities for managing their future training, further education and employment pathways.

Core systems is the term used in this document to refer to the policy settings, governance arrangements, regulatory environments and resourcing decisions within which vocational learning and VET are delivered to secondary students.

Curriculum bodies comprise boards of studies and the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

The Education Council, which reports to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), provides a forum for national collaborative action to improve educational outcomes for all Australians, across all stages of the learning and development lifecycle. Previous names include the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) and the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are authorised to deliver training and/or conduct assessments and issue nationally recognised qualifications.

A school-based apprenticeship or traineeship is the term used in this document to describe a qualification pathway that combines paid employment as an apprentice or a trainee, off-the-job vocational training and senior secondary school studies. Related terms include Australian School-based Apprenticeship (ASbA) and School-Based Apprenticeship and Traineeship (SBAT).

School systems are responsible for policies in relation to schools in state/territory, Catholic and independent school sectors. School systems include state and territory education departments and boards of studies.

The senior secondary certificate of education (SSCE) is the graduation certificate awarded to students in Australian schools. Students completing the SSCE are usually aged 16 to 18 and study full-time for two years. In some states adults may gain the certificate outside of school, such as through an RTO.

The curriculum, assessment and name of the senior secondary certificate of education is different in each state and territory. Related terms include Year 12 Certificate.

Training packages define the range of knowledge and skills (known as competencies) required by different occupations and industries and, in some cases, the circumstances under which competency can be assessed. They also describe how these competencies can be packaged into nationally recognised qualifications that are aligned to the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Training packages are not curriculum and do not prescribe the way training is delivered to an individual. RTOs design courses that deliver the skills and knowledge identified in training packages, while tailoring training to individual learner needs and the needs of local or relevant employers and industries.

Training package developers are responsible for the development, implementation and continuous improvement of training packages. In 2014 there were 12 national industry skills councils that were approved to develop training packages.

Units of competency are the smallest units that can be assessed and recognised as part of a training package. They specify the knowledge and skill, and the application of that knowledge and skill, to the standard of performance expected in the workplace.

VET delivered to secondary students is the same as all other VET, and the same quality standards apply.

The **VET Quality Framework** is aimed at achieving greater national consistency in the way providers are registered and monitored and in how standards in the VET sector are enforced.

VET regulators enforce the quality standards for RTOs and accredit VET courses. In 2014 the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) is the national regulator. The Training Accreditation Council (TAC) in Western Australia and the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) maintain some regulatory responsibility in their respective jurisdictions.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) enables students to acquire workplace skills through nationally recognised training described within an industry-developed training package or an accredited course. A VET qualification is issued by an RTO. The achievement of a VET qualification signifies that a student has demonstrated competency against the skills and knowledge required to perform effectively in the workplace.

Vocational learning helps secondary students explore the world of work, identify career options and pathways, and build career development skills. Vocational learning is delivered within the broader curriculum. It supports students to gain career development skills and provides opportunities for students to 'taste' the world of work through one-off events, initiatives such as enterprise learning, or spending time in a real or simulated workplace.

Volume of learning, a technical term in the AQF, is a dimension of the complexity of a qualification. It is used with the level criteria and qualification type descriptor to determine the depth and breadth of the learning outcomes of a qualification. The volume of learning identifies the notional duration of all activities required for the achievement of the learning outcomes specified for a particular AQF qualification type. It is expressed in equivalent full-time years.

… … …

The following terms used in the 2001 framework have been replaced by new terminology to provide greater clarity for stakeholders.

***Vocational education** (2001 framework) was an overarching term which encompassed vocational learning, enterprise education and VET.*

***VET in Schools** (2001 framework) was the term used to describe the VET provided to school students that resulted in a VET qualification. The 2001 framework also referred to 'VET in Schools qualifications', which suggested these were different to all other VET qualifications.*

BACKGROUND

Preparing Secondary Students for Work sets out a framework for vocational learning and vocational education and training (VET) delivered to secondary students. It updates the *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools* released in 2001 by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.[1] The 2001 framework was introduced at a time when the VET sector, including vocational education in schools,[2] was expanding.

In 2014 the Education Council decided to update the framework to ensure that vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students reflect modern schools and workplaces. Like the earlier framework, *Preparing Secondary Students for Work* is a policy document. It is likely to be of most value to people who set policies, design programs and implement vocational learning and VET, whether they are within schools, schooling systems, industry bodies, training package developers or VET regulators.

The framework will be followed by practical documents and resources for specific audiences such as students, parents, schools, employers and RTOs.

The framework has been developed by a working group of the Education Council. The group has been chaired by the Australian Government and brings together representatives from the state/ territory, independent and Catholic school sectors; industry organisations; training package developers; and training organisations. Their work has been informed by:

- stakeholder consultations, including a national roundtable and roundtables in each state and territory chaired by the Australian Government Assistant Minister for Education, the Hon Sussan Ley MP
- recent reviews and reforms at the state/territory level
- broader VET reform processes underway at the national level.

The world that shaped current delivery models of vocational education has changed, and continues to do so. Technology, globalisation and socioeconomic demands are driving changes in schooling, vocational learning and VET. Stakeholders expressed a sense of urgency that both school and VET systems need to respond strategically to the changes affecting students, schooling, employment and society.

The consultations highlighted similarities and differences between states and territories, and found many instances of effective collaboration, quality delivery and valued outcomes for students. Stakeholders also identified areas where there were problems, sometimes of long standing, and shared their knowledge and experience in a constructive way.

There was a consensus that students need to be at the centre of vocational learning and VET, with decisions guided by their long-term interests. Meeting the needs and expectations of employers is also vital, as they make the ultimate assessment of quality when deciding whether to offer jobs to young people. The interests of students and employers are best met by involving and taking account of the needs of all those who influence and deliver vocational learning and VET, including parents, schools, school systems, training package developers, RTOs and VET regulators.

1. In 2014 the Ministerial Council became the COAG Education Council
2. Often referred to as VET in Schools or VETiS

THE IMPERATIVE

WHAT HAS CHANGED

Schooling is changing and must continue to change to meet the demands of the 21st century. Global competition, technological change, increasing consumer demands and the shift to a knowledge-based economy continue to drive changes in the nature of work, the requirements of employers, and the skills that workers need.

Schools have always prepared students for work, but now need to prepare students to meet higher demands in the workplace. The proportion of low-skilled entry-level jobs is falling, and employers look for skilled and flexible workers who can navigate the world of work; interact with others; plan and organise; make decisions; identify and solve problems; create and innovate; and work in a digital world. Many employers expect school leavers to have already had some practical experience, enabling them to quickly become productive in a new job.

Students and their parents also demand more from schooling. Both know that the working lives of today's young people will be full of change and that they will need to be flexible and responsive. Everyone needs to actively manage their career, moving between or combining work and further study in order to add to their skills and qualifications.

Schools must equip students to make informed work and study choices throughout their lives. Career education, work exploration and work-related curriculum are vital so that students can explore career options and understand the nature and expectations of different jobs and industries. Interested students also need to be able to begin acquiring workplace skills while still at school, through nationally recognised training that provides a clear line of sight to a job.

The importance of this preparation is borne out by the evidence. Students who have achieved a senior secondary certificate of education (or equivalent) are substantially more likely to make a successful transition to further education, training and work than early school leavers.[3] Governments have recognised the importance of this and introduced changes to increase the numbers of students who complete Year 12, including raising the school leaving age to 17.

This has driven changes in the population of secondary schools. Students who would once have left school early to go to an apprenticeship or a job, or disengaged entirely from education, training and employment, now remain in school. Forty per cent of secondary students go directly on to university; 60 per cent do not. Schooling must meet the needs of all these students so that they can successfully transition to a job, a university degree, a VET course, or a combination of these.

These concepts are embedded in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, in which Australian governments agreed that young Australians should:

…be on a pathway towards continued success in further education, training or employment, and acquire the skills to make informed learning and employment decisions throughout their lives

…have the confidence and capability to pursue university or post-secondary vocational qualifications leading to rewarding and productive employment.

More than 90 per cent of schools now offer VET in Years 11 and 12. All states and territories have introduced reforms to increase the number of students who participate in vocational learning and VET. Though specific arrangements differ, VET can be counted towards senior secondary certificates of education in all states and territories. Increasingly, universities allow VET to contribute towards university entrance. These changes are reflected in participation data, which show a 38 per cent increase in the number of secondary students undertaking VET between 2005 to 2012, and a 77 per cent increase in the number of school-based apprentices over the same period.[4]

3. Based on Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth
4. Based on National Centre for Vocational Education Research data

In many ways, assessments of school performance no longer reflect what schools are expected to achieve. Although some measures include factors such as participation in VET and school-based apprenticeships or traineeships, many still focus on higher education achievements such as university entrance. This creates a tension for schools, who still have to meet the needs of all students, while only being measured on how well they meet the needs of some.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

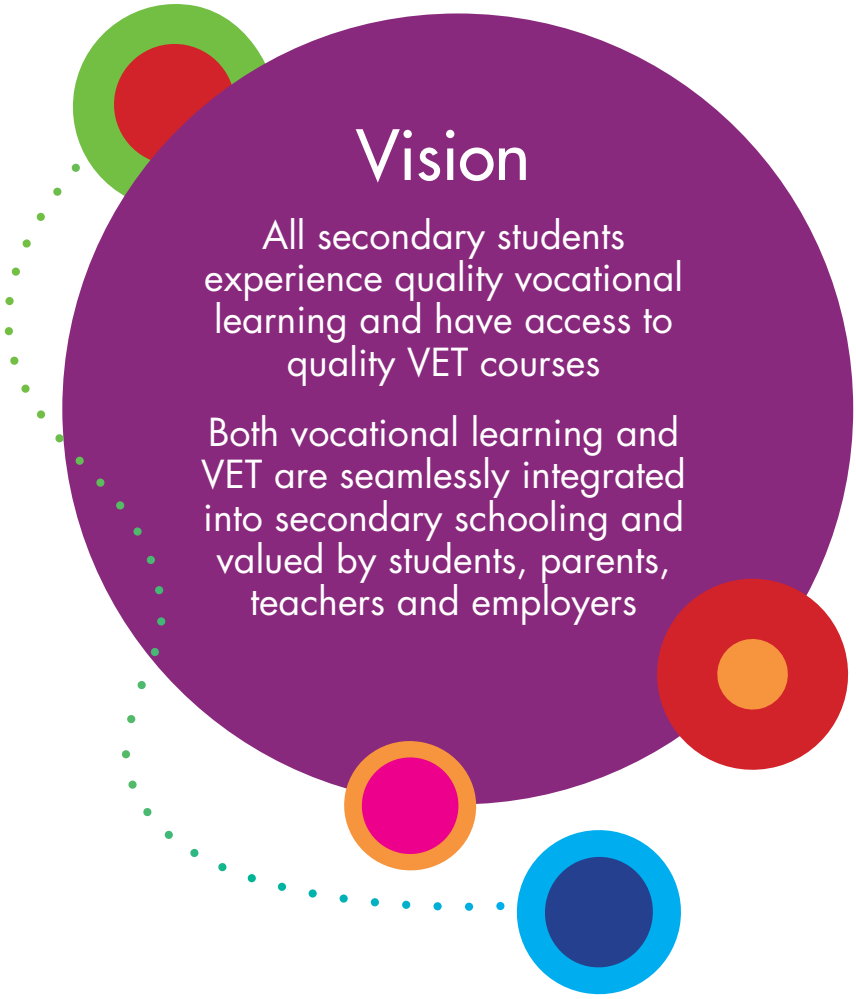
The increased interest in vocational learning and the expansion of VET delivered to secondary students has been encouraging. Nevertheless, stakeholders continue to raise concerns about quality, relevance and employer involvement. Some believe that VET in schools is different from, and somehow inferior to, other VET. Others are concerned that VET is less valued by students and parents than other options, or that VET courses do not deliver the outcomes that students or employers expect. Still others point to areas where policies and regulations exacerbate, or even create, some of these problems.

Some of these issues will be addressed by current reforms to the VET system, but many are specific to the delivery of vocational learning and VET to secondary students.

Underlying many of these concerns is the fundamental question of definition. The terms 'VET in Schools' and 'VETiS' are widely used, but contribute to the misconception that VET delivered to secondary students is different from all other VET. The lack of clear terminology also contributes to the differing views among stakeholders about the purpose, expectations, outcomes and responsibility of 'VETiS', as they are often using the same term to talk about different activities that *do* have different purposes.

The need for a new national framework is clear. *Preparing Secondary Students for Work* unpacks the current issues, identifies the underlying causes, and provides guidance on how to resolve them. It creates shared understanding by clearly distinguishing between **vocational learning** and **VET**, and noting that the VET delivered to secondary students is the same as all other VET.

Preparing Secondary Students for Work establishes a vision which all stakeholders can support.



This framework sets out what is needed to achieve the vision:

- clarity of terminology, purpose and expected outcomes
- collaboration to meet the needs of students, schools, and employers
- confidence in the quality, value and long-term benefit of vocational learning and VET
- core systems[5] that are efficient, streamlined and support the best interests of students and employers.

Preparing Secondary Students for Work creates a platform for change, but cannot in itself create the change. This will come from the individual and collective actions of stakeholders—taking the principles and shared understandings set out in this document, discussing them with other stakeholders, reflecting on current practices, and identifying and implementing potential improvements. Judging by the willingness and commitment of the many people and organisations that have participated in the development of this framework, the signs for the future are bright.

5. Policy settings, governance arrangements, regulatory environments and resourcing decisions

THE COMPONENTS

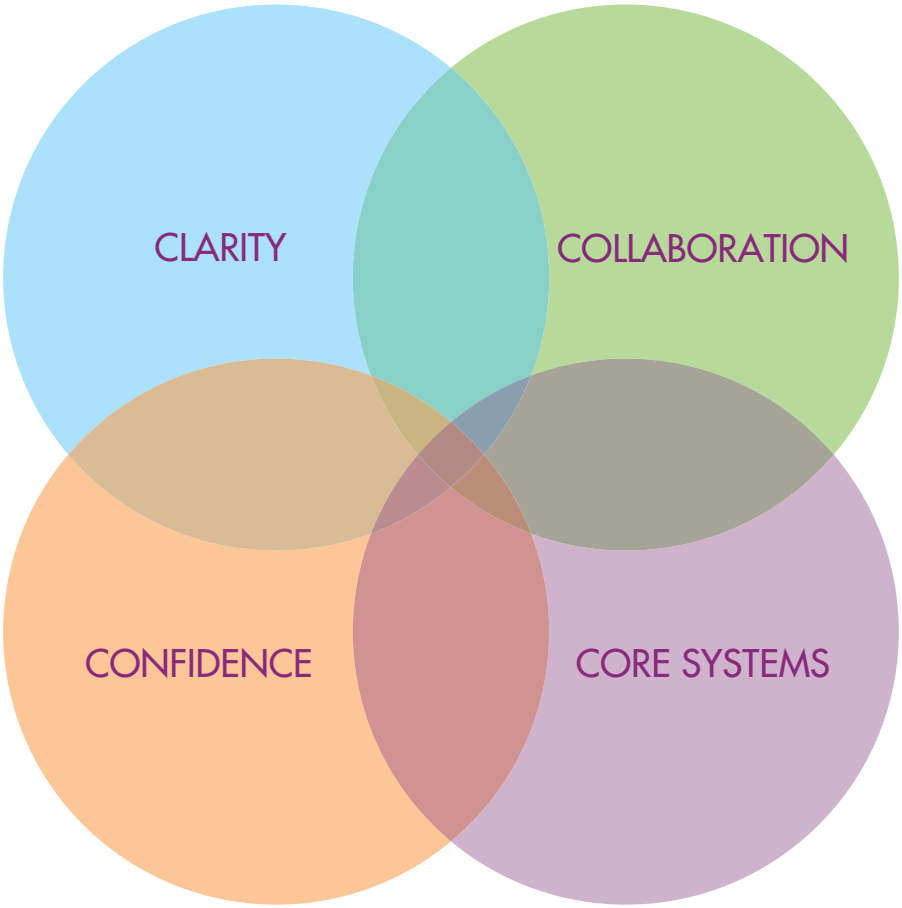
To achieve the vision for vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students, this framework focuses on four fundamental components: *clarity, collaboration, confidence* and *core systems*.

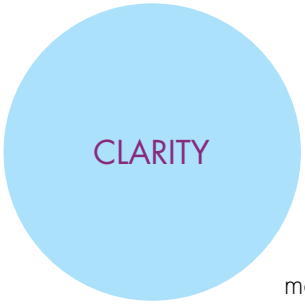
This helps to make sense of the complex environment in which vocational learning and VET are delivered to secondary students. Both have to take account of multiple regulatory and operational settings and involve many stakeholders at different levels, including students, parents, schools, school systems, employers, RTOs, training package developers and VET regulators.

This section analyses each component and identifies what is needed, what good practice looks like, what challenges can arise, and what stakeholders need to do. The analysis is informed by stakeholder consultations, existing practice and research.

While each component is presented separately, references to other components are highlighted to recognise their interdependence. For example, *clarity* is both important in and of itself, and essential to effective *collaboration*. Similarly, clarity and collaboration build *confidence* in the quality of vocational learning and VET. And it is only through collaboration that *core systems* can provide the policy and regulatory settings that support success.

The discussion of each component ends with a list of implications. They indicate priority areas for action, and provide a basis for stakeholders to work together to further improve the vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students.





The words used to describe vocational learning and VET shape perceptions and expectations. When a term means different things to different people, or carries implications that are not accurate, problems arise.

The terms 'VET in Schools' and 'VETiS' have become catch-all terms for quite different programs and activities. This includes VET delivered to secondary students; school-based apprenticeships and traineeships; learning about work and employability skills; student support services such as career counselling; and exploratory activities such as try-a-trade and work experience.

The use of 'VET in Schools' to cover such a wide range of programs and activities has caused confusion about their purpose, led to different expectations of their outcomes and contributed to concerns about their quality.

Terminology

Common and consistent terminology is paramount to achieving a shared understanding of vocational activities and programs provided to secondary students.

This framework moves away from terms such as vocational education and VET in Schools, replacing them with terms that clearly distinguish between two different areas: **vocational learning** and **VET**.

Vocational learning includes career education programs, through which secondary students explore the world of work, identify career options and pathways, and build career development skills. Vocational learning is delivered within the broader curriculum. Career exploration needs to begin early in secondary school, if not before, while students are still forming their sense of identity, their beliefs about work and their ideas about their own future possibilities.

Vocational learning also includes subjects that allow secondary students to undertake general work-related curriculum, or explore particular occupations or industries. The Work Studies curriculum developed under the national curriculum is an example. Vocational learning includes opportunities for students to 'taste' the world of work through one-off events, initiatives such as enterprise learning, or spending time in a real or simulated workplace.

Strong vocational learning programs ensure that student choices about school subjects and post-school education, training and employment are based on a thorough understanding of their options; the occupations and industries they are considering; the different pathways they can follow to achieve career objectives; and the variety of training and employment pathways that they can follow with a particular qualification.

Vocational education and training (VET) enables students to acquire workplace skills through nationally recognised training described within an industry-developed training package or an accredited course.[6] The achievement of a VET qualification signifies that a student has demonstrated competency against the skills and knowledge required to perform effectively in the workplace. All VET qualifications must be issued by RTOs.[7]

Secondary students undertaking VET courses may complete a full VET qualification, or some units of competency from within a qualification. Similarly, students who start a VET qualification may complete it while at school or after they have graduated.

The location where VET is delivered may vary in the school, at an external RTO's premises, in a workplace or even online. Regardless of the location of delivery, the same quality standards apply.

Students may also be able to undertake VET through a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship, which enables them to combine school studies; paid work and on-the-job learning with an employer; and structured learning and assessment delivered by an RTO.

VET delivered to secondary students is regulated by the VET sector, and is identical to VET offered in any other context. This framework therefore uses the term VET, avoiding the confusion and quality concerns created by the term VET in Schools, which led to perceptions that a different standard applied.

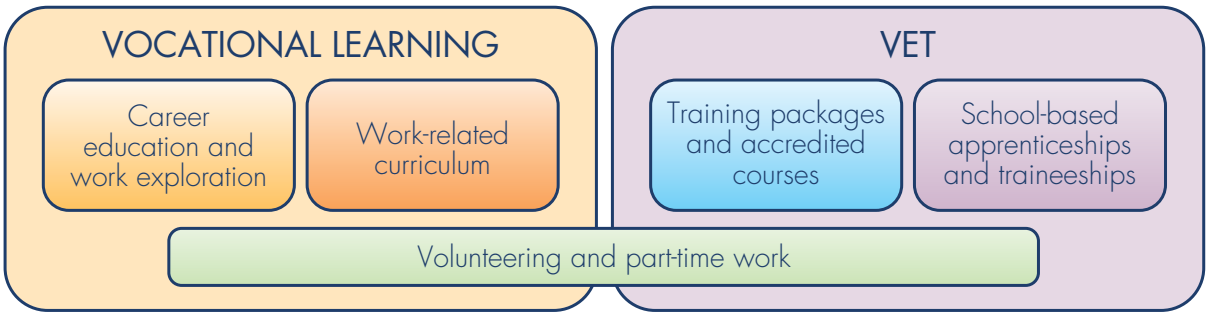
6. See glossary for definitions of these terms
7. Schools and school systems may be RTOs in their own right

This will help to address any concerns stakeholders may have around issues such as standards, trainer qualifications, workplace assessment and quality assurance—all of which are managed by the VET sector.

Many secondary students also develop work-related skills through volunteering or part-time employment, complementing the vocational learning and VET they participate in at school.

Clearly distinguishing between vocational learning and VET may be a particular challenge with some accredited courses.

While all accredited courses are nationally recognised VET qualifications, some are more focused on general work-related learning rather than acquisition of workplace skills.[8] In terms of their purpose, these courses align more with vocational learning, and this has contributed to the perception among some employers that the VET delivered to secondary students is a 'diluted' form of VET.



Vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students
See Appendix A for more detail

Purpose and expectations

Parents, students, schools and employers need to be able to distinguish between vocational learning and VET. Clarity about their different purposes helps to ensure common expectations about what secondary students will experience through these activities, what outcomes they will achieve and what they will be able to do in the workplace as a result.

Schools have a critical role in ensuring that students, parents and employers understand the exploratory purpose of vocational learning, and the skills acquisition purpose of VET. They need to communicate whether particular activities are vocational learning or VET, and what the purpose and expected outcomes are.

For example, work experience and structured work placements are different in nature and intent. Work experience is part of vocational learning and its purpose is career exploration; while structured work placements are part of VET and focus on skills acquisition and practical experience. When schools arrange work experience or structured work placements, they need to ensure that students, parents and employers are clear about the purpose, the benefits and the expected outcomes.

Industry has a strong preference that all VET courses draw on training package competencies to provide a clear line of sight to a job. VET based on national training packages directly articulates or connects to further VET qualifications, whereas most accredited courses that are not based on training packages do not.

Schools and employers agree that the purpose of VET is to develop the skills required in the workplace. While this is the main priority for employers, schools also value VET as a way to improve student engagement by offering a wide range of subject choices and different ways of learning.

8. For example, certificates in 'Leadership Skills', 'Skills for Work and Training', 'Work Readiness', 'Workplace Practices' and 'Core Skills for Employment and Training—Numeracy'

Students may also choose VET as a way of experiencing an industry and deciding whether it is right for them. This exploration through VET reduces the likelihood of students making uninformed choices about post-school education or employment and subsequently dropping out. Students, further education providers and employers all benefit.

For this reason, some schools and school systems require students who want to do VET to first demonstrate an understanding of why they want to do a particular course, and how it will contribute to their career or pathways plans.

IMPLICATIONS

Clarity of terminology, purpose and expectations for vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students requires that:

- schools, school systems, employers and RTOs incorporate the distinction between vocational learning and VET into what they do and how they communicate
- schools, school systems, employers and RTOs recognise the different purpose of work experience and structured work placements, and the different outcomes expected from them.

Effective vocational learning and VET depend on collaboration. Central to this is bringing schools and employers together.

School systems, industry, RTOs, training package developers, curriculum bodies and VET regulators also need to collaborate to ensure the quality, value and relevance of vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students. This collaboration needs to occur at all levels, from local to national.

Collaboration at the local level

Students reap greater benefits from vocational learning programs when these are based on strong collaboration with employers. Contact with employers gives students a real-world insight into what jobs exist (and may exist in the future), what those jobs are like, and what skills and qualifications they require.

There are many ways to build in contact with employers—including career expos, workplace visits and practical activities such as try-a-trade—and to draw connections with the workplace within individual lessons. All enhance students' career exploration and build their understanding of how what they learn at school is relevant to their work beyond school.

Schools also need to engage actively with parents as they help their children make career decisions. Parents guide their children based on their personal experiences and general understanding of the workplace, which may not be current or comprehensive. Schools need to help parents update and broaden their knowledge of the range of opportunities available to their children. This means engaging them as effective partners in career education. In particular, schools need to give parents *confidence* that VET is a valuable option for their children by providing information about what VET is, how it works, the broad range of fields that it covers, and how it can benefit students.

Local collaboration with employers is also critical for VET. Employer engagement gives schools *confidence* that the qualifications they offer will give their students the strongest pathways to sustainable employment in their local community—be it a capital city, a regional centre or a remote town—while also being valued by employers in other parts of the country.

Collaboration is fundamental to structured work placements, which are a central element of many VET courses and highly regarded by employers. The placements provide on-the-job learning in an authentic environment and ensure that students develop skills to the standard expected by industry. Schools, employers and RTOs need to collaborate to ensure that there are sufficient structured work placements for the number of VET students, and that they are quality placements.

When *core systems* ensure that training packages and units of competency specify work placement requirements, the need for schools and employers to collaborate on structured work placements is clearer. Schooling systems can also choose to make work placements mandatory for VET courses that can be counted towards senior secondary certificates of education, and some have done so. This has resourcing and coordination implications for schools and employers.

Schools, RTOs and employers also need to collaborate on practical issues such as timetabling and flexible delivery so that students can do the VET they want without missing out on other aspects of their schooling. Collaboration with other schools, RTOs and/or employers can increase access to physical infrastructure, skilled people and other resources that may not be available otherwise. Such arrangements can offer students a greater choice of VET courses and exposure to a wider range of training settings.

Collaboration can and should benefit employers as well as students. For example, by engaging with secondary students, employers gain an insight into their potential future workforce, promote job opportunities in their industry, and enhance the relevance and quality of training.

Employers who take on a school-based apprentice or trainee not only gain a part-time worker, but directly influence the skills they obtain.

Whether collaboration to support vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students occurs through informal relationships or formal partnerships, the arrangements work best when they:

- consider the needs, aspirations and interests of students
- are built on strong foundations including trust, shared goals, mutual benefit, accountability and evaluation
- have commitment and support from stakeholders
- are based on open lines of communication, including with students, parents and employers
- connect learning to the workplace and provide a range of opportunities to engage with the world of work
- take account of local, regional or national industry needs
- have sufficient resources.

Collaboration at state/territory level

Both vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students are strengthened when there is collaboration at the state/territory level. Areas for focus include information on education, training and employment opportunities; priority setting for training and workforce development; the articulation between schooling and VET systems; and the interaction between policies, rules and regulations at the state/territory level.

When school systems collaborate with employers and with training and higher education providers on career information specific to their state/territory, they maximise the relevance of this information to their students. Formal or informal mechanisms that allow industries and employers to advise state and territory authorities of their current and future workforce needs help school systems set priorities for public funding of VET courses, as well as informing the content of vocational learning.

Mechanisms also need to be in place to allow stakeholders to agree what VET courses are appropriate for delivery to secondary students. This is particularly important where there are occupational health and safety or age-related issues associated with a particular occupation or industry; where access to necessary equipment may be unavailable to secondary students; or where the complexity of learning outcomes requires considerable experience in a work environment. These issues are not different from those for VET delivered to other students, but there may be some issues that are more relevant for VET delivered to secondary students.

Schools are not all alike, and nor are employers, students, school systems or RTOs. Collaborative approaches therefore need to take account of the differences within these stakeholder groups.

Core system policies at the state/territory level—such as recognition arrangements for VET in senior secondary certificates of education—interact with national core systems such as VET regulators and training package developers. Collaboration at these intersections can identify areas where increased consistency would be beneficial, and ways to achieve this while preserving local flexibility. Collaboration can also address any tensions between the different approaches of school systems and the VET system, and improve clarity, value and outcomes for students and employers alike.

Collaboration at national level

It is essential at the national level to build a shared understanding, take advantage of economies of scale, and address issues that arise from intersections with national policies and processes. This needs to include the national organisations that make decisions affecting the local delivery of vocational learning and VET to secondary students, such as VET regulators and training package developers.

Collaboration underpins the development of training packages and accredited courses, but needs to take account of the differences within stakeholder groups. VET regulators and training package developers must consult widely with schools, school systems, employers and RTOs to ensure that all voices are heard, and differences in potential impact are understood.

National collaboration on developing resources such as the Work Studies curriculum can increase their quality by drawing on a wider range of skills and expertise, as well as reducing costs and increasing access. Collaboration on products to build a shared understanding of vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students is likely to provide similar benefits.

Students and parents often move schools and communities or plan for a future that will take them across state borders. Similarly, many employers are national businesses or operate in a geographic location that crosses borders. All will notice any inconsistencies between states and territories, and may be confused or frustrated by them. Collaboration between school systems, within industries and across VET is an important way to address this by facilitating consistency where appropriate while preserving local flexibility. Collaboration can also reduce frustration by ensuring understanding of the reasons for and benefits of any differences.

IMPLICATIONS

Collaboration is most effective in supporting vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students when:

- schools create opportunities for student engagement with employers
- schools, school systems, RTOs and employers understand the benefits of collaborating and seek opportunities to do so
- consultation is an integral part of national, state and territory policy development processes
- consultation on changes to the VET system includes schools and school systems
- school systems, VET regulators, training package developers and other stakeholders collaborate to resolve issues at the intersections between policies.

CONFIDENCE

There are two essential elements required for stakeholders to have confidence in vocational learning and VET: the *quality* of the programs offered and the *information* available to help them understand the purpose and outcomes of these programs.

When secondary students, parents, schools, training organisations and employers are part of an 'informed marketplace', they will be working from a shared understanding and have common expectations.

Students

Quality vocational learning enables secondary students to make choices for their future with confidence, based on access to the best information, advice and experiences at the right time for them. This involves developing the skills they need to manage their careers and to explore options, confident that the pathways they take will lead to the attainment of their goals.

Vocational learning is most effective when it provides opportunities for secondary students to have conversations with employers and people who work in industries they are interested in, as well as direct experience in workplaces. These activities help build the confidence of students that they are on the right track.

To decide whether to undertake VET, students need information about what VET is; how it works; the different ways it can be accessed, including school-based apprenticeships or traineeships; how it can contribute to their senior secondary certificate of education; and how it can benefit them.

When choosing between VET options, students need information about what jobs a particular VET qualification can lead to; how widely the qualification is recognised; how it is valued by employers; and any implications for further training, higher education and employment. Such information gives students confidence that the VET they undertake while at school can provide direct entry to employment or open doors to future study, including further vocational or higher education qualifications.

Students gain confidence in VET as an option when they understand that it is simply a different way of learning, not an inferior one. By providing a *different* way to apply concepts such as literacy and numeracy, VET can help students connect theory and practice, and make education more relevant and meaningful.

Students can study VET courses alongside core curriculum, opening up a wide range of work and education opportunities. VET qualifications provide a clear line of sight to a job, but can also provide entry into higher education. Students are more confident in the value of VET when these benefits are explained.

While the VET system can be complex, information about it written for secondary students needs to be easily understood by students and their parents. It needs to be clear, be written from the perspective of the student, and not assume a familiarity with VET terminology or structures.

Parents

It is important for schools to provide parents with opportunities to be involved in their child's vocational learning. Parents need to be confident that if their child pursues a VET pathway it will open up opportunities for sustainable and meaningful employment in a valued occupation and leave the door open for future study in related and unrelated fields.

Parents also need information on what VET options are available, how these are integrated with other aspects of schooling, and what outcomes to expect from VET delivered to secondary students.

Schools, school systems, RTOs, training package developers and employers can all contribute to developing information that addresses the needs of parents. This information needs to be made available to parents before their children begin to make subject choices that will affect their later options.

Schools

Schools need to be confident that they are providing students with comprehensive, accurate and impartial information on occupations, qualification requirements, education and training pathways, and labour market trends. This confidence is increased when the information is developed in collaboration with employers and training and higher education providers and is regularly updated.

Schools also need to be confident that their teachers and career advisers are able to link learning content to the workplace and give sound career advice based on a good understanding of contemporary workplaces and practices. This understanding can be fostered through professional development activities such as industry placements, studies in career development and the delivery and assessment of VET, as well as engagement with employers.

Schools have a complex task in planning what VET courses to make available to students. They have to take many factors into account including the interests and aspirations of their students, the expectations of their community, their access to qualified trainers and to infrastructure, the availability of work placements, and the cost of delivery.

To have confidence in the VET courses they offer, schools need information from school systems and employers on the industries and occupations that are in demand in their community, in their state and nationally. They must also understand the skills that employers value, and that if they offer accredited courses, employers most value courses based on national training packages.

Core systems must provide advice on the different ways that schools can make VET available to their students; how to assess the quality of external RTOs; and the appropriateness of individual VET courses for delivery to secondary students.

A crucial factor for schools is whether employers will engage in the vocational learning and VET they wish to offer. Employers can significantly increase the relevance and quality of these by participating in design and delivery, providing local information, and making facilities and equipment available. Most critical, however, is their willingness to directly engage with students, particularly to provide sufficient workplace experience opportunities and structured work placements.

Core systems also need to ensure that schools understand any potentially negative consequences for students of obtaining VET qualifications. For example, some certificate-level qualifications may affect a young person's ability to access a subsidised place for post-school training in a different field.

These issues must be factored into school decisions about which VET courses to offer. Information about them must also be built into the advice that schools provide to secondary students and parents.

Employers

Employers need to be confident that schools have prepared young people to be skilled and capable workers. This confidence is increased when students demonstrate that they have chosen an occupation based on career exploration and a sound understanding of the workplace and are prepared to adapt to the employer's specific needs.

Employer confidence is also increased when they are directly involved in vocational learning. This may be by providing input to career information, helping schools identify local skills needs, or engaging with students in career exploration activities and work-related curriculum.

To be confident about providing work experience or structured work placements, employers need information about the purpose of each, the different expectations in terms of activities and outcomes, any regulatory requirements, and how to make the work experience or placement successful for both student and employer.

Employer confidence is increased when the outcomes of vocational learning and VET reflect their expectations of the skills and workrelated competencies that students will develop. General employability skills are set out in the *Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework*—a set of non-technical skills, knowledge and understanding that underpin successful participation in the workplace. For VET, the work-related competencies are set out in training packages.

Local employers also appreciate opportunities to talk to schools and school systems about the generic and specific skills that they need students to develop.

Employers have more confidence in VET delivered to secondary students when it gives students access to industry-standard equipment, is supported by people with relevant and current industry experience, meets expectations regarding volume of learning, and includes time in actual workplaces. These are the essential elements of quality VET delivery. Schools can meet these expectations through training facilities and through collaboration with other schools, external RTOs and especially employers.

RTOs

RTOs (including schools that are RTOs) need to have confidence that the training they deliver is valued by employers and gives secondary students a pathway to sustainable employment. This requires collaboration with local employers and schools to ensure that their courses respond to local needs.

RTOs can improve the confidence of stakeholders by working with schools and employers to identify the best arrangements to deliver (and assess) VET courses to secondary students. This may include identifying ways to reduce costs by using existing staff and infrastructure available to the RTO rather than replicating these within the school.

Schools and RTOs must ensure that each student's choice to undertake VET is an informed one based on clear and comprehensive information about the training requirements for particular jobs or industries, and how a VET qualification contributes to meeting those requirements. RTOs must also ensure that students and parents have information on costs; understand the implications of financing their training through a government loan scheme or other loan; and understand any ways that achieving a VET qualification while at school may impact on their future access to training or employment.

Schools, students, parents, employers and RTOs all need confidence that appropriate arrangements are always in place to ensure safety, accountability, consistency and quality. This requires the relevant *core systems* to be clear about their respective roles and responsibilities, to communicate these to stakeholders, and to collaborate as appropriate.

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships

A school-based apprenticeship or traineeship provides secondary students with a unique opportunity to combine a VET qualification with an employment contract while also completing their senior secondary certificate of education. School-based apprenticeships and traineeships provide the clearest line of sight to a job, are highly valued by employers and are often identified as the preferred pathway for students to transition from school to work, particularly in the trades.

Commencing an apprenticeship or traineeship while still at school has other benefits that improve the confidence of students, parents and employers. A school-based apprentice or trainee has usually made their decision based on a strong understanding of and interest in the industry. Unlike a full-time apprentice or trainee, a school-based apprentice or trainee has access to pastoral care support through their school. This can help them manage their relationship with their employer and deal with any personal issues that might affect their engagement. This support helps reduce drop-out rates.

A school-based apprentice or trainee also continues vocational learning and non-VET subjects as part of their senior secondary certificate of education, which can develop their skills in other areas of benefit to the employer such as critical thinking, teamwork, or advanced mathematics.

The combination of school, training and work can present challenges, particularly if arrangements such as timetabling are not supportive. For students and employers to have confidence that a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship is manageable, it is imperative that schools, employers and RTOs work together to develop arrangements that work for each school-based apprentice or trainee and their employer.

Another challenge associated with school-based apprentices and trainees is a perception that they cost more to employ than other apprentices or trainees. Employers will be more confident about taking on a school-based apprentice or trainee when they understand that, under modern awards, pay rates are equivalent for all apprentices or trainees who have the same level of skills and qualifications.

Quality outcomes

Confidence in vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students requires that schools, students, parents, employers and RTOs agree on the outcomes expected.

Secondary students who have experienced quality vocational learning:

- are able to reflect on their own skills, strengths and preferences
- have developed core transferable skills that form a solid foundation for future study and work
- know how to find and evaluate information on education, training and employment opportunities and pathways
- understand their options and feel confident in making choices and responding to change
- are familiar with modern approaches to recruitment and the skills they require
- have had the opportunity to study work-related curriculum and to 'taste' the world of work.

Secondary students who have undertaken quality VET:

- have received, or are on the pathway to receiving, a nationally recognised qualification that is valued by employers
- have achieved competencies that meet the expectations and needs of employers, and meet the standards and requirements of VET regulators
- know the occupation(s) their qualification can lead to, both in the short term and the long term
- know the education and training pathway(s) they can follow with that qualification.

To determine whether these outcomes are being achieved, *core systems* need to ensure that data collections are consistent and reliable, and that measures used to judge the success of vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students align with their purpose.

IMPLICATIONS

Confidence in vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students is greater when:

- students and parents have accurate, up-to-date, impartial and student-friendly information about vocational learning, VET and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships
- teachers and career advisers have opportunities to update their knowledge of current workplaces and practices
- employers have opportunities to be involved in the design, delivery and assessment of vocational learning and VET
- mechanisms exist to engage with employers and industry to determine which VET qualifications are appropriate to deliver to secondary students and in what circumstances
- RTOs give school students and parents accurate information about individual VET qualifications, including benefits, costs and future implications
- schools, employers and RTOs collaborate to ensure streamlined arrangements for individual school-based apprentices and trainees
- schools, employers and RTOs promote the benefits of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships to students and parents
- employers are involved in the provision of work placement opportunities.

CORE SYSTEMS

Vocational learning and VET are delivered to secondary students within a complex web of policy settings, governance arrangements, regulatory environments and resourcing decisions. While these core systems sit largely within schooling and VET systems and agencies, they also extend into employment. The key objectives of all core systems should be to make delivery as easy and streamlined as possible, while ensuring quality.

Core systems facilitate the best outcomes for students when they understand and respect their distinct roles and responsibilities; provide clear guidance to stakeholders; recognise where their systems interact; and collaborate to address any points of tension.

Roles and responsibilities

Vocational learning is the responsibility of school systems and individual schools. Work-related curriculum generally comes under state and territory boards of studies, while the national Work Studies Curriculum is a joint responsibility of the Australian and state and territory governments.

The Australian and state/territory governments have a shared role in policy leadership for VET, collaborating with employers and other stakeholders on development and implementation including the regulatory framework, training packages and quality standards. State and territory governments determine their own training priorities, resourcing and delivery arrangements, and consult with employers about regional skills needs and training priorities.

VET regulators assure quality within the VET system by ensuring compliance with the standards for RTOs, training packages and accredited courses.

Training package developers work with an industry or group of industries to identify the skills and knowledge they need in their workforce. They then articulate those needs into the units of competency and combination of units that comprise nationally recognised training packages.

Boards of studies in each state and territory school system recognise VET in their senior secondary certificates of education, acknowledging that young people need flexible options to gain the skills, knowledge and understandings necessary for a range of future transitions and pathways. Each board of study decides how much VET can contribute to its senior secondary certificate, and how that VET is recognised. This recognition occurs through the following set of common practices:

- all VET given credit towards a senior secondary certificate is drawn from nationally recognised training packages or accredited courses
- the VET is delivered and/or assessed either by, or in partnership with, RTOs that comply with the VET Quality Framework
- all VET that gains credit towards a senior secondary certificate is assessed within a competency-based assessment framework by assessors who comply with the VET Quality Framework
- secondary students are awarded nationally recognised VET qualifications and/or Statements of Attainment by the RTO delivering and/or assessing the VET
- each board of study consults with industry groups in its state or territory about the recognition arrangements between VET and its senior secondary certificate.

Providing clear guidance

The first responsibility of core systems is to provide clear guidance to the different stakeholders involved in the delivery of vocational learning and VET to secondary students. For example, school systems have a key role in advising schools on the different ways that they can provide their students with access to VET, such as becoming an RTO; entering into auspicing arrangements with public, private or school system RTOs; using purchaser-provider arrangements; or a combination of these.

School systems can reduce the burden on schools, and give them confidence that they are making the best choices for students, by advising schools on the different models; their cost, resourcing and quality implications; and ways to identify quality external RTOs.

Australian governments, working with training package developers, could greatly improve *clarity* by requiring training packages to provide clear guidance on those aspects where ambiguity exists. For example, there are currently differing views among employers, schools, school systems and RTOs about whether students should be able to do particular qualifications in particular settings.

Employers may also expect students to have experienced on-the-job learning, even though this requirement may only be implied or optional in the training package. Training package developers could be more specific about the on-the-job requirements of a training package, recognising that this would require employers and RTOs to be able and willing to provide the necessary placements.

Training packages and accredited courses should include a plain English description to give students and parents a clear understanding of what the qualification is, what occupation(s) it can lead to, and what education and training pathways it can lead to. For accredited courses, this information could include whether the course is drawn from a national training package, and if not, whether the purpose of the course is primarily general work-related learning (therefore more aligned with vocational learning), or the acquisition of workplace skills.

Any new requirements should be phased in as training packages and accredited courses are updated. Comprehensive consultation should explain the rationale for changes to training package requirements and individual training packages and accredited courses, and aim to avoid any unintended consequences.

Addressing tensions

Sometimes there is a tension between policies or regulations established by one system to fulfil its responsibilities, and a desirable feature of vocational learning and VET. For example, school systems are accountable for the quality of schooling, and fulfil this through regulations on things such as who can teach in a school. These policies can make it more difficult for tradespeople and others with relevant skills to deliver training within schools, even though school systems recognise that quality is increased when people with deep industry knowledge and expertise are involved. Similarly, the VET system requirements for trainers to have current industry expertise can mean that teachers are not qualified to deliver VET.

In other cases, two core systems have separate mechanisms to fulfil similar responsibilities, such as workplace safety or the protection of young people. When secondary students go into the workplace, employers often have to comply with both. This administrative burden on employers could be reduced through *collaboration* between the schooling and employment sectors to streamline the requirements.

Interaction between state-based policies can lead to unintended consequences. For example, in some jurisdictions students who achieve a Certificate II or higher qualification while at school may become ineligible to access a subsidised place for post-school VET in a different field.

Unintended consequences can also be caused by interactions between state and national policies. In some industries, for example, competency-based wage progression puts some students with VET qualifications on a higher pay scale than some employers consider appropriate for the amount of on-the-job experience they have had, particularly compared to full-time apprentices. As a result, these students find that their VET qualifications actually disadvantage them in the employment market.

At all levels, the core systems need to *collaborate* to ensure that schools, RTOs and students are aware of these consequences, and to find ways to reduce them.

Measuring performance

Measurements of performance depend on a clear and accepted definition of what is success. To be recognised as fair and accurate, the definition of success for any activity needs to reflect the purpose and intended outcomes.

School and VET systems need to ensure that their data collections reflect the purpose of VET delivered to secondary students as outlined in this framework—primarily aimed at skills acquisition, but also a valid and valuable way for students to test career possibilities.

The success of VET delivered to secondary students should not be measured simply based on whether students progress to further education or employment in the same field when they leave school. Other curriculum subjects are not deemed unsuccessful if students do not pursue those subjects in university, or enter a job in the same field. Rather, school systems and the community accept that secondary students choose their non-VET subjects for a range of equally valid reasons. The same standard must apply to the VET courses that students choose, recognising that the contribution of both options to a student's future learning and career transcends the short-term outcome.

Research and analysis based on this understanding provides a fairer and more accurate picture of whether the VET delivered to secondary students is generating its intended outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS

Core systems improve vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students when:

- school systems support schools with advice on the different ways they can make VET available to their students
- governments, working with training package developers, require training packages to provide clear guidance about whether the package is suitable for school-age students (including any preconditions); what settings are suitable for delivery (and any special requirements); what settings are suitable for assessment (and any special requirements); and what are the requirements for structured work placements
- schools coordinate work experience and structured work placement opportunities, and offer the VET courses that students and employers need
- policies provide a supportive environment that minimises costs and red tape, and facilitates innovation and local flexibility
- short-, medium- and long-term measures of success recognise the many purposes of VET delivered to secondary students, and are based on standards similar to the measures of success for non-VET subjects in secondary schooling.

APPENDIX A: CREATING CLARITY—VOCATIONAL LEARNING AND VET

	VOCATIONAL LEARNING	
	Career education and work exploration	Work-related curriculum
What is it?	• programs through which secondary students explore the world of work, identify career options and pathways, and build career development skills	• subjects that allow secondary students to undertake general work-related learning or explore particular occupations or industries
Who is it for?	• all students	• students interested in particular industry or subject area
How is it recognised?	• may count towards SSCE	• may count towards SSCE
Delivery settings	• school—may include workplace exposure through collaboration with employers	• school—may include workplace exposure through collaboration with employers
Engagement with the world of work	• desirable—may include employer visits, work taster events, enterprise learning, spending time in a real or simulated workplace	• desirable—may include employer visits, work taster events, enterprise learning, spending time in a real or simulated workplace
Why students choose	• explore personal interests, skills, goals • find out about world of work in general • develop transferable skills for work	• exploring possible career field • best choice of available options • develop their skills in the area
Why schools offer	• help students develop skills for work to manage their careers, and decide on senior secondary subject choices and pathways	• expand student choice • provide different ways of learning • prepare students for a range of post-school pathways
What employers expect of students as a result	• basic understanding of world of work • understanding of self and why they want to enter a field of work • gained core skills for work	• general understanding of an industry area • have had exposure to an industry • will still require training to develop specific industry skills and knowledge
	Volunteering and part-time work	

Volunteering and part-time work provide a student with vocational learning and potentially credit towards a qualification. They are valued by employers and students.

	VET	
	Training packages and accredited courses*	School-based apprenticeships and traineeships
What is it?	• nationally recognised qualifications (or components of qualifications such as units of competency) from a training package or an accredited course	• a qualification pathway that combines paid employment as an apprentice or a trainee, off-the-job vocational training and senior secondary school studies
Who is it for?	• students who have chosen a specific vocational pathway, including pre-apprenticeships	• students who have chosen a specific vocational pathway, including trade pathways, and also want to gain their SSCE
How is it recognised?	• may count towards SSCE • leads to VET qualification (which may be completed during or post schooling)	• may count towards SSCE • leads to VET qualification (which may be completed during or post schooling)
Delivery settings	• school, RTO premises, workplace or combination	• combination of school, RTO premises and workplace
Engagement with the world of work	• workplace learning highly desirable • training packages may specify workplace learning requirements	• workplace learning an integral part of delivery • contractual arrangement exists between employer, student and RTO
Why students choose	• interested in the industry area • exploring possible career field • want to acquire industry skills and nationally recognised qualifications valued by employers	• committed to vocational pathway • an early start to an apprenticeship qualification while pursuing SSCE • earn income while studying
Why schools offer	• expand student choice • provide a different way of learning • give students qualifications valued by employers	• enable students to start apprenticeship while still being supported at school • encourage students to continue their broader education and obtain SSCE
What employers expect of students as a result	• understanding of the industry • have had the opportunity to experience an industry and decide whether it is right for them • have job-specific skills and knowledge	• occupational and workplace-specific skills • on a pathway to completing an Australian Apprenticeship • competent and productive in the workplace
	Volunteering and part-time work	

*Accredited courses are classified as VET, but the purpose of some of these courses is more aligned with vocational learning.

This framework is a call to action to schools, school systems, employers, RTOs, training package developers and VET regulators to embrace these principles in all aspects of vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students.

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