

**Submission to the Years 9 to 12 Review of  
Education in Tasmania**

**Establishing a Vocational College for Senior  
Secondary students**

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## **What is a Vocational College**

Vocational colleges are designed to deliver vocational education and training qualifications (VET) to students completing their final years of schooling. This is usually done in a way that delivers both vocational qualifications and the senior secondary certificate. However, the organisation of the college is around VET with expectation that students are enrolled to participate in one or more programs that will lead onto further training and employment.

## **Relevance to Tasmania**

Tasmania has a 20-year history of delivering VET programs in the senior secondary colleges as well as in some non-government schools and district high schools.

These had a common point of origin in the adaptation of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum's Training in Retail and Commerce (TRAC) which adopted a one-day per week in the workplace model where students undertook workplace training. The model has evolved over the years but at the heart of virtually all Tasmanian VET programs is an expectation that students will spend a substantial amount of their time undertaking workplace training (between 20-30 days per academic year).

The problem in Tasmania is the low participation rate of senior secondary students in VET programs estimated to be between around 30%-40% of enrolments with completion of a qualification above 20% of total enrolments. Schools and colleges with a strong vocational focus have up to 90% of students completing one or more vocational qualifications.

Bradfield College (NSW) and Southern Cross Catholic Vocational College(NSW), both vocational colleges have much stronger VET outcomes with dedicated programs that recruit, induct, educate and train and lead directly to further education, employment and training. The curriculum choice offered is far less than in Tasmanian colleges, subject choice is guided by employment and career requirements, individual programs of study are packaged into VET qualification achievement and future careers. VET programs on offer are shaped by real labour market needs. Other schools with high VET participation like St Columbans Catholic College in Caboolture QLD (a national award winner) and Box Hill Secondary College in Melbourne run heterogeneous programs but with a much greater focus on and uptake of VET.

Tasmanian secondary colleges are well placed to run expanded VET programs where at least 75% of students should be achieving a VET qualification as part of school completion. The investment in resources and infrastructure are strong including in specialist fields like automotive, media, electronics and marine.

## **Why VET?**

There is a wealth of evidence nationally to show that VET can inspire young people to stay on at school and complete. The programs running VCAL, the alternative VET-based senior certificate in Victoria, show impressive engagement and completion. Students in Gladstone

QLD running under the banner of EQIP, a consortium of schools, TAFE, big business, and the Department of Education, are choosing to complete school doing VET because of enhanced access into apprenticeships and traineeships leading to well paid jobs in the local heavy industry. Mararra Christian College in Darwin runs a construction and engineering VET program that operates almost like a labour hire operation for the local construction industry. Sydenham Catholic Regional College in Melbourne runs as an enterprise and training operation with an on-site bakery and patisseries, picture framing and sign-making business, restaurant and commercial catering operation that provides authentic learning.

VET programs work particularly well with students challenged by poverty, behavioural issues, literacy and numeracy issues or with special needs. The opportunity to engage in authentic learning including workplace learning is powerful, where knowledge and skills can be applied immediately.

VET programs can be packaged into customised programs for individual learners, removing the challenges of choosing courses from up to 200 subject choices. A course built around automotive, hospitality or construction for example would include the VET Certificate I or II program with units of competence from VET Foundation courses covering literacy and numeracy, relevant TCE courses that might include English Communications, Physical Science or Information Technology. The more elaborate School-based Apprenticeship course also adopt a packaging approach to course elements.

VET students are usually more motivated particularly by workplace learning where knowledge and skills have immediate application. Learning how to do an EFPOS transaction or use a theodolite have immediate application. Adult working environments seem to have additional appeal where learning seems relevant and purposeful. The opportunity to transfer knowledge and skills to other learning areas is common as does an appreciation of mathematical or communication skills suited to the workplace.

VET programs also expose young people to the world of work and to employer work roles including potential mentors. Their subsequent work readiness is usually well established as a result.

VET programs bring schools into contact with industry increasing awareness of workforce demands and the skills that are valued. Building community and business networks can have a powerful influence on the public image and perception of schools. School and industry collaboration can build powerful alliances that have strategic value in building strong education and training programs.

### **Low uptake of VET in Tasmanian Colleges**

Despite the good publicity that is frequently attached to successful VET programs in colleges, for example through state and national training awards and industry recognition, VET seems to suffer as a low status option for college students. Vocational programs are given little prominence in college promotional material often embedded in the wide range of other course options.

Colleges do little by way of organising course options around future work and careers. VET programs do provide such a focus but this aspect is not promoted. Course selection processes focus on student interest rather than career pathways. Career counselling has never been a strong focus of student support compared with other states. NSW and VIC all have dedicated and trained career counsellors in their schools.

College leadership compared with other states provides little advocacy specifically for VET. The preferred messages continue to centre around choice and diversity in programs with a continuing major focus on university pathways. The school-industry partnerships so obvious in vocational colleges are largely absent in Tasmanian colleges. This means that the highly visible industry promotion of VET so common in places like Gladstone, at St Columbans and Southern Cross Catholic College is largely absent.

Industry promotion of VET in Tasmania continues to be weak. The TCCI shows little interest in the public promotion of VET to its members. Industry associations are often critical of the quality of school-based VET students and that they are not work ready.

The direct involvement of TasTAFE in school VET has never been strong in Tasmania compared with other states so that planned pathways from VET programs into TAFE are not strongly promoted. Where TAFE has been involved pricing of services for colleges has frequently been a disincentive.

Enrolment processes still support student interest primarily but teacher availability is an important factor. Staff members compete for enrolments to ensure viable class sizes. Staff general promotion of VET programs is limited for obvious reasons around personal job preservation and probably lack of knowledge about VET courses.

School VET programs are still viewed as being expensive. There is considerable rigidity around what can be offered to students, very often determined by staff funding allowing 600 hours per student per year. VET qualifications don't easily fit the standard 50-100-150 hours for TCE courses which makes standard 4-line teacher load building more challenging.

The Tasmanian Department of Education once a strong proponent of VET largely ignores it now. The DoE website is limited to some very general comments about enrolling in VET programs with the suggestion that the enquirer go to secondary college websites for more detail. There are no longer any VETiS director-level positions within the agency. By contrast the NT Department of Education has two directors responsible for VET in schools.

The Tasmanian Assessment Standards and Certification Authority (TASC) includes virtually no VET qualifications on its list of available courses and so no capacity on its program building tool to build a VET focussed course. There is almost no reference to VET on the TASC website not even a link to <https://training.gov.au> the principal website for VET qualifications and training packages.

VET information is provided by colleges although the amount of detail varies. Rosny College provides detail on VET courses, timetabled study hours but no mention of the credits toward the TCE. Claremont College and Hellyer College simply list VET qualifications. The way VET contributes to the Tasmanian Certificate of Education is largely absent.

## **What would a Tasmanian Vocational College look like?**

A vocational college needs to be fundamentally about vocational training – that is its core business. All publicity, course materials, web-based communications need to be clear that this is its purpose.

### **Location**

Either or both Claremont College and Newstead College already have sound vocational programs in place and have contemporary buildings and VET infrastructure. They both have comparatively low levels of student success in completing school. Claremont had a strong vocational and applied learning focus at its establishment in the 1980s which could be easily be rejuvenated.

Claremont's northern suburbs location with higher levels of adult and youth unemployment and an extensive small to medium business environment with access to bigger enterprises like Cadbury's and INCAT make it worthy of consideration.

However, student recruitment should be across the southern region with students with an interest in vocational pathways encouraged to enrol.

### **Structure**

The Vocational College needs to have a curriculum that is dominated by programs shaped by the Australian Training Framework and the Training Packages developed under major industry groups.

That curriculum should be developed from hard data on both the industry skills needs of southern Tasmania and on the youth labour market conditions.

An education-industry stakeholder group should be established comprising leaders from education, the VET sector, major industries, TasTAFE, Skills Tasmania, Unions TAS and the TCCI. This education-industry group should play an advisory role in informing higher level decision-making by the Vocational College. Its role is also to provide advocacy services for the college, to help source workplacements, to keep alert for new skills needs and training opportunities.

Governance should be by a board with independent chair comprising members from local high schools, TasTAFE, college staff, CEO/Principal, key local industries, and a parent representative.

A CEO/Principal should be appointed with a strong background in the VET sector training preferably with a good understanding of VET in Schools programs in particular the structure and management of School-based Apprenticeships. High level skills in effective negotiation with industry and skills bodies is essential. Some experience in the management and operation of Trade Training Centres would be advantageous.

VET staff should have strong credentials in relevant areas of industry and skills training, hold the VET Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE4016) and preferably hold a teacher

education qualification. Credibility in the relevant industry could assist leadership and mentoring.

#### **Industry Areas**

The curriculum should be guided by the knowledge and skills needs of the region going into the future. On current trends these are likely to be around:

- Public administration and safety – local government
- Construction including plumbing, electrical, fabrication
- Health care and social assistance – aged support and care
- Education and Training
- Retail trade
- Accommodation and Food Services
- Professional Scientific and Technical Services
- Transport Postal and Warehousing
- Horticulture and agriculture

Young people need to also develop interpersonal skills appropriate to getting a job. Part of any vocational training program should include developing skills in personal presentation (deportment and dressing, grooming, speaking skills particularly telephone, negotiation skills), resume and application writing skills, interview skills and questioning skills.

Knowledge and understanding of employment and community support services relevant to young people attempting to enter the workforce should be nurtured.

#### **VET Program Design**

For each industry area chosen a program should be designed which includes:

- The relevant VET Training Package qualifications
- Complementary TCE TASC accredited courses particularly in Maths, English and ITC
- Electives that support personal development and work readiness skills
- 30 days structured work placement in an industry setting.
- Online support or training delivery where appropriate

Where there is demand around an industry area a School-based Apprenticeship or Traineeship should be established based on negotiations with industry to determine on and off the job training delivery (which could include TasTAFE and other RTOs) and relevant TCE courses.

#### **Enrolment in the Vocational College**

This should be a carefully staged process as follows:

- Application and recruitment – promotion of the Vocational College's programs should be ongoing with potential clients essentially exposed to a recruitment process. This should involve a written application, an interview, a training contract which specifies the college's expectations, the rights and responsibilities of the student and the expected outcomes. Where applicants are initially found to be

unsuitable an alternative program should be put in place. This might use Foundation Skills Training Package qualifications or Units of Competency to build the skills necessary for successful entry into the preferred program. This could include TCE subjects like Essential Skills and Foundation course relating to literacy, numeracy and ICT are relevant.

- Induction – an intensive 5-day program which brings the student into contact with a mentor who will supervise the program, provide feedback on performance and support if/when challenges occur and oversee any course difficulties or requests for change. The student would undertake a workplace visit, meet all teachers and trainers and fellow participants and be taken through the program. Exposure to the range of services provided including specialist career advisory support, recreational and sporting opportunities, health and well-being support would be covered.
- Attendance – students should be engaged in a full-time program which at a minimum should be 600 hours per year. Conventions about absence which operate in the workplace should apply and the expectation be clearly communicated. Request for any anticipated leave should be made in advance, any absence should be explained to the program mentor and more than 2 days leave should have a doctor's certificate.
- Progress – the formal requirements around VET assessment of competencies on and off the job should be the guiding framework for student feedback. This should be monitored by the mentor and support provided where difficulties are encountered. This should be personalised and friendly ensuring that a strong rapport is established. Close support and appropriate intervention should be undertaken whenever there is any suggestion that the student is considering dropping out.
- Workplacement – Students should be carefully inducted into workplacements so that they are familiar with the requirements of the workplace, with safety considerations, with their anticipated role and whoever will be responsible for on the job training and assessment.
- On-the-job assessment – This needs to be a joint effort between the responsible college teacher/trainer and the workplace trainer and assessor. Provision needs to be made for workplacement visits by the responsible teacher and an opportunity for teacher and trainer assessor to condier student progress.

### **Critical elements of a Vocational College**

Vocational Colleges are quite different to conventional colleges because their focus is on vocational training. The practices that have governed secondary colleges for decades around wide subject choice, learning programs based primarily on interest, a default priority

toward university preparation and conventional classroom based instruction need to be abandoned.

#### **Instructional Design**

This needs to take account of modern instructional training approaches including accessing online learning resources and the range of digital applications now commonly used on personal devices. Accessing state-of-the-art technology and infrastructure in industry and other training providers should be used. Taking account of skills sets as well as skills qualifications is important. Workplace simulations can complement on-the-on training.

#### **Building Partnerships**

Successful vocational colleges are characterised by strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with key stakeholders. These provide industry input into vocational college program design, skills demanded by industry and provide a range of placement services. In return industry gets assistance with recruitment of trainees and apprentices with the opportunity to 'try before they buy', are promoted through the vocational college publicity and marketing and cab preferential treatment is accessing college-related markets. Strong partnerships bring credibility to the college and its programs, help raise awareness and assist 'badging' the college as a quality institution.

Taking Claremont College as an example worthwhile partnerships should be established with:

- Local government particularly the Glenorchy city council
- Local businesses who normally recruit from the college
- Aged care facilities
- Disability services providers
- Voluntary organisations providing services like Meals on Wheels, Salvation Army
- Housing Association
- Construction industry – like Fairbrothers
- TasTAFE
- With local high schools particularly those proposing year 11 and 12 programs
- Major retailers
- Brighton Transport Hub
- Group Training companies
- Beacon Foundation

#### **Providing Pathways**

A Vocational College needs to establish pathways both into the college and beyond at the conclusion of training. To do this they need to:

- Establish good relations with primary schools and look for ways to make younger students begin to think about future careers and the ways in which they might achieve career goals. Create opportunities for K-10 students to participate on-site in relevant activities.



- Work closely with high schools offering year 11 and 12 to establish pathways that will further advance and specialise education and training Students for example doing a year 11 Certificate 1 in Construction might continue on at Claremont Vocational College in year 12 on a School-based Apprenticeships in Construction Certificate III.
- Work closely with TasTAFE to establish a range of pathways that build on entry-level qualifications to achieve full qualifications and employment.
- Keep a record of student progress both within college and beyond and understand the success and failures.

### **Building the Brand**

The best vocational colleges work hard to promote the excellent outcomes from their programs. Their client and stakeholder networks will assist this enormously through their own publicity. Communities will always be quick to recognise the achievements of their young people particularly where they lead to employment and training. Take the time to participate in competitions (like WorldSkills and State Training Awards). Celebrate milestones and achievements with graduation ceremonies or thank-you events held for host employers. College leaders particularly the CEO/Principal needs to be at the forefront of these efforts as often as not in the company of a stakeholder or partner.

Successful vocational colleges often run on a similar time-table to businesses with 8.00am start times running through into the evening where necessary. Students wear a uniform that is workplace appropriate and appropriately badged.

### **Further Information**

Southern Cross Catholic Vocational College - <https://sccvc.nsw.edu.au/>

Bradfield Senior College - <http://www.bradfield.nsw.edu.au/>

Box Hill Secondary College - <http://www.bhssc.vic.edu.au/>

St Columbans College Caboolture - <http://www.stc.qld.edu.au/Pages/default.aspx>

EQIP - <http://eqipgladstone.com.au/students/>

Marrara Christian College Trade Training Centre - <http://www.ntcc.nt.edu.au/index.cfm?fuseaction=page&p=67#>

Sydenham Catholic Regional College Trade Training Centre - <http://www.crcttc.com.au/#/home>