

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Western Australia Inc



Submission

to the

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training

for the

Inquiry into the Perceptions and Status of Vocational Education and Training

from the

State Council of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Western Australia Inc.

ICPA (WA)

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Western Australia, ICPA (WA) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Inquiry into Perceptions and Status of Vocational Education and Training and to highlight the challenges that are unique to rural and remote students, to ensure effective support for these children.

ICPA (WA) is a voluntary, apolitical, not-for-profit parent organisation which advocates on behalf of our members for equity of access to a continuing and appropriate education for all geographically isolated children and students, from early childhood through to tertiary, trade and training. The majority of member families (approximately 300) of ICPA (WA) reside in small communities in rural and geographically isolated areas of Western Australia, and all share a common goal of achieving equitable access to an appropriate education for their children and the provision of services required in achieving this.

ICPA (WA) considers Vocational Education and Training (VET) is an important part of education providing the opportunity to acquire practical skills and facilitate technical knowledge through a wide range of vocational training programs. Traditionally, VET has provided training that highlights knowledge and skills required for a specific trade, craft or job function however, the horizon of vocational training has expanded with the evolution of time and there is now a VET course for every industry. As a pathway to apprenticeships, traineeships and school-based traineeships (SBATs), VET has also grown in popularity as a practical alternative pathway to university through standalone qualifications.

INFORMATION AVAILABLE

VET training is built on partnership between government and industry. The challenge is having accessibility to the right information and resources. Students are able to access a level of information through the school system, via dedicated career development co-ordinators and information evenings. More could be done to enhance the understanding of the accessibility and complexities of VET programs/apprenticeships within the school environment and beyond post compulsory education.

The involvement of government, employers and registered training organisations can lead to confusion and a lack of understanding on how the system operates; what is involved, how to apply and where the various levels of responsibility lie. Beyond the school environment it is important to have a clear and concise understanding of the levels of expectations, roles and responsibilities and who to approach for recourse if the VET program/apprenticeship is not progressing correctly.

For many families in remote and rural Australia their children are required to move away from home to undertake an apprenticeship and this distance presents its own set of unique challenges therefore having information readily available is of paramount importance.

Recommendations:

- A one-stop comparison website with information including:
 - Registered Training Organisations (RTO),
 - job availability,
 - government non-financial and financial support,
 - costs and tools to assist with career pathway decision-making, and
 - identification of individual career options tailored to interests and abilities.

Information including how to:

- apply for Vocational Education and Training (VET) course/apprenticeship,
- entry options, pre-requisites, application processes,
- what the components of an apprenticeship involve i.e., work vs training blocks, and
- course delivery options

would all be valuable.

- Inclusion of flow charts as a tool to decipher where/how to source relevant information pertinent to a chosen vocation,
- Increased collaboration between industry and education providers detailing the availability of apprenticeships/traineeships.

PERCEPTION AND STATUS

A practical approach to education offers students the opportunity to prepare for the real world and to leave school with employable skills. Within certain industries employers hold VET qualifications in high regard. VET delivers a structured program certified by independent organisations that ensures students possess the skills required to perform a specific occupation. Whilst employers may value VET programs there still remain a number of myths:

- VET graduates earn lower wages than university graduates,
- University graduates find work more easily than VET graduates,
- VET graduates have a lower academic standing.

Many of these perceptions can be evoked at the school level. A school's success appears to be focussed on ATAR results, often used as judgement rather than a tool for measurement. This focus immediately has an impact on the status given to those that choose a non-ATAR or VET program. A student may have studied a school based traineeship or a VET program, and excelled in their chosen field and achieved great success. However, there is still a perception that someone who has sat their ATAR is acknowledged for their academic prowess. It is regularly perceived the ATAR student has a higher social standing than a VET student.

The reference to VET programs as being *an alternative pathway* to university implies a second-best option and that stigma remains even if the student does not intend to attend university. Within the school environment the level of expectation for academic success only appears to be placed upon ATAR students and the same value not given to VET students; in some instances, the quality of teaching delivered is directly related to whether you are an ATAR student or not.

For many students living in rural and remote areas apprenticeships and training opportunities can appear to be too difficult to undertake or maintain. Remoteness, the impact of time lost in travel and their inability to meet relocation and living expenses associated with these opportunities can be major impacts. These families often have to rent accommodation, have access to a vehicle to get to work and other associated work expenses. When rural and remote families undertake an apprenticeship close to home but need to travel to a major centre for a block of study at TAFE there are additional travel and accommodation costs to be funded. The low wage of an apprentice creates a scenario where this becomes all too hard, and it is not uncommon for apprenticeships to be abandoned.

A good school will offer pathways that suit a child's needs and give them the opportunity to be the best version of themselves.

Students who choose to undertake a full-time VET program at TAFE do not receive the same financial support as students attending university, and as such reduces the attraction to a following a VET pathway.

Graduating university is a structured celebration with great recognition by each university of the success of their students. Attending your university graduation is a momentous occasion. When graduating an apprenticeship there is not enough recognition afforded.

Recommendations:

- Entry to university should be classified as having different entry methods of equal weighting. For example, entry can be via: ATAR score, VET pathway or portfolio entry, with the latter two not being referred to as alternative.

- Society needs to refrain from its focus on ATAR results. ATAR is a measure of academic ability, but within society and community there is a requirement for so much more. The publication of ATAR results, without recognition of the results of VET students, by schools and the media, is counterproductive to the success, value and status placed on VET students.
- Rural and remote students need to be recognised as a separate disadvantaged group to ensure appropriate assistance is provided to those most in need ensuring equity of access to post school qualifications whether that is an apprenticeship, a traineeship, attending TAFE or university. More Government financial support is required for rural and remote families to reduce the barriers in accessing apprenticeships and VET programs.
- Greater credibility should be given to graduating apprentices.