

Service Skills Australia VET in Schools policy statement

This policy is designed to provide a statement of the service industries' position in relation to VET in Schools programs.

It outlines industry requirements around the appropriate use of industry training package qualifications, and the critical principles for meeting industry requirements in the development and delivery of VET in Schools programs.

Definition

Australian secondary schools provide a range of vocational education and training and work-related education programs. These can be broadly divided into the following categories:

- **School-based Australian Apprenticeships:** programs that involve students combining paid part-time employment in industry with formal enrolment in a training package qualification or units of competency. The arrangement is based on a signed training agreement which specifies the agreed training plan and provides for structured on and off job training. The Registered Training Organisation role may be provided by the school itself or an external RTO.
- **School-based VET programs:** these programs are generally offered through the school itself and involve students working toward a nationally recognised training package qualification through completion of a specific subject on the school curriculum.
The specific delivery and administrative arrangements relating to this model vary widely between jurisdictions and often between individual schools.
- **General industry and workplace education:** other education that provides introductory information on careers, industry, commerce and the world of work.

This policy is concerned with the middle point above; it responds to particular industry concerns around School-based VET programs based on industry training package components, also referred to as 'VET in Schools' or 'VETIS'.

Industry imperatives around quality VET in Schools delivery

Training packages are the national skills frameworks for industry, designed specifically to provide an effective basis for industry skills development. Training packages include qualifications at a range of levels, to reflect career and training pathways within industry.

To maintain the integrity of training package qualifications, it is critical that their implementation throughout the VET system is consistent with industry intent and quality standards. This ensures that industry is able to accept qualifications and

statements of attainment gained through any pathway or registered training organisation as a statement of an employee's workplace competence to a consistent, national industry standard.

VET in Schools programs aligned to training packages must meet this requirement that assess workplace competence. This can represent a specific challenge for schools, for the following reasons:

- Competency-based vocational training represents a relatively new concept for many teachers and administrators working within the school system. Competency-based programs also require cooperative arrangements with employers and other partners, which are not issues that most schools have been required to consider for traditional 'academic' subjects.
- Schools are not primarily vocational training providers, and so typically lack the specialised staff, facilities, industry partnerships and resources that other Registered Training Organisations must access as part of operating their core business.
- Schools may also face unique challenges and tensions in resourcing, scheduling and integrating VET programs with other school subjects and activities.

Service Skills Australia acknowledges that VET in Schools programs vary widely in quality, resourcing and effectiveness, and that specific VET in Schools programs are highly regarded and acknowledged as developing competent graduates. It is the very inconsistency and variability between the VET in Schools programs offered in individual jurisdictions and by specific schools that is at the core of industry concern.

Of particular concern is that there are no common standards around the approval, regulation, resourcing, administration, monitoring and delivery of VET in Schools programs across jurisdictions.

Summary of Service Skills Australia position

Any Vocational Education and Training in schools program should be based on the following principles:

1. the programs offered are consistent with industry direction around the suitability of specific qualifications for VET in Schools delivery, as defined in the endorsed training package;
2. VET in Schools programs support the attainment of workplace competence;
3. structured workplace learning is integrated into all VET in Schools programs, and must be managed to ensure effective learning and assessment;
4. VET in Schools should increase, rather than limit, pathways available to students.

Key principles for VET in Schools programs

1. Programs offered are consistent with industry direction around the suitability of specific qualifications for VET in Schools delivery, as defined in the endorsed training package;

Training package policy permits each training package to specifically identify those qualifications that industry supports for delivery under VET in Schools (VETIS) programs.

The list of qualifications provided in each training package should be used as the foundation for identifying or verifying the suitability of particular VET in Schools programs.

In relation to the service industries, industry does not support the delivery of some training package qualifications through VETIS programs; these include trade and higher-level qualifications, and in some cases, more technically-intensive entry level qualifications.

This is determined on the basis that all training package qualifications are developed to reflect industry structures and related skill needs, and therefore reflect differing levels of technical skill, knowledge and employability skills. Many training package qualifications require a foundation of skills and knowledge – particularly employability skills – that are typically built over years of employment and life experience and through prior learning. In the absence of formal mechanisms to ensure that VETIS students hold the necessary underpinning skills before enrolment, industry does not support the use of all training package qualifications for VETIS programs.

Where a jurisdiction seeks to allow schools to implement qualifications that are not identified within the relevant training package as appropriate for VETIS delivery, these proposals should be put to the national Industry Skills Council for a national industry response.

2. VET in Schools programs must support attainment of workplace competence

Qualifications and Statements of Attainment issued under industry training packages are statements of workplace competence, not just of learning and knowledge. All VET programs based on training packages – including VET in Schools programs - must ensure that real workplace competence is developed and validly assessed.

VET in Schools programs utilising training package qualifications and units must be designed and delivered to support the attainment, and valid assessment, of workplace competence.

This means ensuring that all VETIS programs incorporate the following features, in accordance with advice provided in the training package and supporting user guide:

- Ongoing access to industry-standard equipment and resources, to allow for practice and development of skills
- Qualified and experienced trainers and assessors, with current industry skills and experience, relevant to the qualification/s they are delivering and assessing. Assessors without appropriate industry knowledge are unable to make valid judgments around industry requirements, practices and standards, invalidating their assessments. Teachers and schools may work in partnership with current industry operators to ensure that the appropriate level of industry skill and knowledge is available to students.
- Assessment undertaken in an industry/workplace environment, requiring the candidate to consider commercial imperatives, respond to client traffic and range of requirements, and deal with time restrictions, competing priorities and contingencies. This allows for the valid assessment of all dimensions of workplace competence.
- Formal arrangements and appropriate support for structured workplace learning, of sufficient duration to allow the development and consolidation of skills, and formal assessment of workplace competence.

Where individual schools are not adequately equipped to meet these requirements, delivery and assessment should be made available through establishing partnerships with other Registered Training Organisations, including schools as appropriate, with sufficient funding and resources made available to support this option.

3. Structured workplace learning must be integrated into all VETIS programs, and must be managed to ensure effective learning and assessment

One of the key issues cited by industry has been the lack of appropriate structured workplace learning and workplace application of skills in some VET in Schools programs. Industry is of the view that successful completion of training package qualifications require integrated on and off-the-job learning.

While these requirements may be partially met through the use of school-based enterprises and well-equipped training facilities, industry believes that formal work placements for all students are also necessary to ensure workplace competence.

In addition to the requirement for sufficient workplace learning, there are key requirements in terms of the *nature* of workplace learning that need to be met to ensure that students gain real learning opportunities in the workplace.

The key issue is that structured workplace learning is not simply normal work, nor is it traditional 'work experience'. It must involve genuine training across the full

range of workplace operations required by the training package qualification. This typically requires exposure to a broad range of skills and processes.

Service Skills Australia considers that all VET in Schools students must be covered by a signed training agreement which specifies the agreed training plan and provides for proper structured on and off job training.

This agreement must also be resourced and monitored effectively. In practice, each student should have access to a designated person with appropriate expertise and adequate resources, who liaises between student/school/employer/RTO, co-ordinates on and off-the-job delivery and keeps all parties appropriately informed.

A number of states allow school students' part-time or casual work to be counted towards work placement requirements. While Service Skills Australia supports this principle, it is necessary to ensure that these students are able to access structured workplace learning across all required skills within their work. Some students' casual employment may already reflect the use of this range of skills, but others' regular duties may be confined to a narrow range of routine tasks that do not build competence across the range of skills required by the qualification. In this case, a formal program of rotation of duties may need to be negotiated with the employer, or additional work placements may be required.

4. VETIS should increase, rather than limit, pathways available to students

VETIS should increase, rather than limit, pathways for those leaving school at the end of year 12. VETIS programs should provide multiple pathways into employment and/or further training and education. Service Skills Australia recommends that VET in Schools programs should, as far as practicable, keep open the option of participation in higher education.

Participation in VET in Schools programs should therefore not disadvantage students for the purposes of university entry. This means that senior students undertaking VETIS should do so as part of a broad general education program that combines a Senior Secondary Certificate of education with nationally-recognised training package units of competency and/or qualifications.

Service Skills Australia does not support the establishment of separate 'vocational' and 'academic' streams, based upon which subjects contribute toward tertiary entrance. Students are effectively pushed into one stream or the other, with VET in Schools positioned as the option for those who are unlikely to achieve a university entrance. This diminishes the status of both VET in Schools and VET in general, and negates its potential for making a positive contribution to the development of all young people.