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# Participation in VET in Schools

## Introduction

VET in Schools refers to nationally recognised training available to senior secondary students as part of their school curriculum, which generally involves a period of structured workplace learning. The options range from programs of a few hours a week to part-time school-based apprenticeships. VET in Schools programs count towards a Year 12 certificate and an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Certificate, and may count towards university entrance. Schools may also offer other VET subjects that do

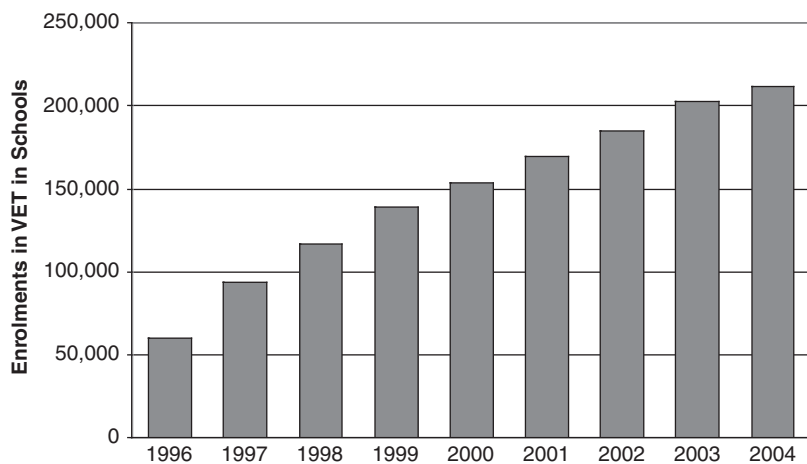
not meet all of the requirements of a VET in Schools program.

Most secondary schools offer VET subjects. While 70 per cent of schools offered VET in Schools in 1997, this grew to 87 per cent in 1999 and over 95 per cent in 2005 (Anlezark, Karmel & Ong, 2006). Over the same period, there was strong growth in the number of students participating in VET in Schools, which rose from only 16 per cent of Year 11 and 12 students in 1996 to 38 per cent by 2000 (Figure 1). In 2004, nearly 212,000 students enrolled in subjects that contributed to Certificate I, II or

## Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth BRIEFING HIGHLIGHTS

- Student enrolments in VET in Schools have grown substantially. Among members of the LSAY cohorts, 17 per cent of Year 11 students were enrolled in a VET subject in 1997, 27 per cent in 2000 and 30 per cent in 2003/2004.
- Over the past 10 years, the broad profile of the young people who participate in VET in schools has not changed: they tend to have lower levels of achievement, and to be from more disadvantaged backgrounds.
- VET in Schools students are more likely to be studying school subjects in the Key Learning Area of technology, and less likely to be enrolled in mathematics, humanities and social sciences, languages other than English, the biological sciences and the physical sciences.
- Since its introduction, VET in Schools has contributed to improved retention of the less academically inclined young people to Year 11 and, to a lesser extent, to Year 12.
- Undertaking VET subjects improved the post school outcomes for Year 11 leavers as well as for Year 12 leavers who were not university bound by providing for a smoother transition to employment or post school VET.
- Those enrolled in VET in Schools were more likely to pursue VET pathways (Australian Apprenticeships and TAFE courses) after leaving school from Year 11 or Year 12 than their counterparts. This indicates that VET in Schools has been effective at promoting VET careers.

Figure 1 Year 11 and 12 student enrolments in VET in Schools, 1996 to 2004



Source: NCVET, 2004

LSAY Briefings is a series produced by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), drawing on data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), a research program managed jointly by ACER and the

Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training. The aims of the series are to bring summaries of findings from LSAY research to a wider audience and to examine particular topics in brief. Related references, are listed at the end of the paper.

III qualifications as well as to their senior secondary certificate<sup>1</sup>, and this represented around 49% of all senior secondary students. In the same year, 13,000 students commenced part-time Australian School-based Apprenticeships (MCEETYA, 2004).

## Scope of this Briefing paper

This *Briefing* looks at participation in VET in Schools programs by members of three groups of young people who have been part of LSAY since 1995, when VET in Schools offerings experienced sustained growth. The first group comprises young people who were in Year 9 in 1995 and included VET subjects as part of their Year 11 or Year 12 studies in 1997 and 1998. The second group comprises young people who were in Year 9 in 1998 and included VET subjects as part of their senior secondary studies in 2000 and 2001. Both of these groups participated in VET in Schools while the program was still developing and have provided valuable data on their post-school pathways. The third group included in this *Briefing* were 15 years old in 2003. At the time, some were in Year 11, but most were in Year 11 in 2004. For this group, data are available for Year 11 only. The three cohorts provide an opportunity to examine changes in participation in VET in Schools between 1997 and 2004 and their outcomes.

In LSAY, participation in VET in Schools was assessed from responses to questions asking students in Years 11 and 12 whether they were enrolled in vocational education and training subjects at school, TAFE or another training organisation; and, secondly, whether any of the subjects studied while at Years 11 and 12 on which they had provided information were TAFE or vocational education and training subjects. Among

members of the LSAY cohorts, 17 per cent of Year 11 students stated that they were enrolled in a VET subject in 1997. This figure grew to 27 per cent of Year 11 students in 2000 and to 30 per cent of Year 11 students in 2003-2004. These estimates are lower than those reported by MCEETYA up to 2004 but closer to the figure of 37 per cent reported in the 2005 National Report on Schooling. The lower participation figures from LSAY probably also reflect the fact that some students do not recognise that they are participating in VET in Schools subjects.

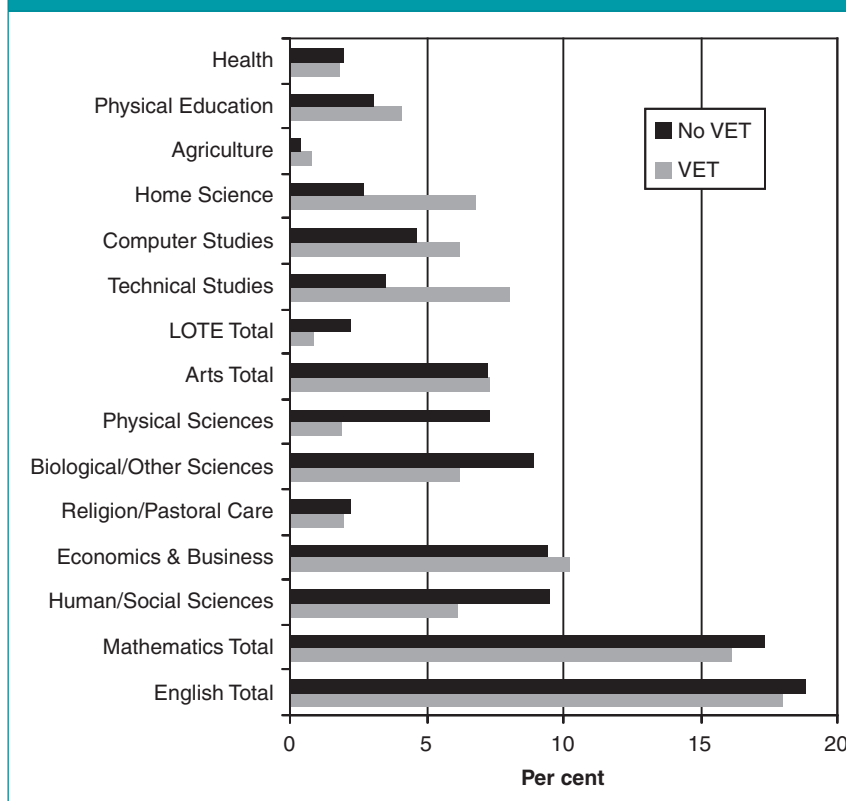
## Participation in VET in Schools

More than six in ten students participating in VET in Schools from the LSAY Year 9 in 1995 and 1998 cohorts had scored in the

lowest two achievement quartiles on tests of academic achievement, which were administered as part of LSAY in 1995 and 1998. Among members of the 2003 LSAY cohort, VET participants scored significantly lower than non-participants in all four domains of the PISA tests -mathematical literacy, reading literacy, scientific literacy and problem solving.

Males and females are equally likely to take up VET in Schools. Among members of the 2003 LSAY cohort, 31 per cent of males and 29 per cent of females participated in VET in Schools while in Year 11. Males more frequently studied in the learning areas of Technology (90% of enrolments), Computing (73%) and Health and Physical Education (58%), while females were more frequently enrolled in Home Economics (75% of enrolments), Business Studies (64%) and The Arts (58%).

Figure 2 Year 12 subject selection and VET in Schools participation



<sup>1</sup> MCEETYA (2005) reported 211 885 students enrolled in VET in Schools programs in 2004. Notes to Exhibit 1 state that the New South Wales data are counts of *enrolments*, not *students*, as students may be enrolled in more than one industry area. This is an over-enumeration of 15 627 students. The adjusted figure for the number of students in Australia enrolled in VET in Schools programs in 2004 is 196 258. Figures for previous years require similar adjustments for New South Wales VET in Schools participation.

In 2005, a total of 182,919 students were enrolled in VET in Schools programs including School-based Apprenticeships and traineeships, representing 37 per cent of school students undertaking a senior secondary certificate. (MCEETYA ANR 2005)

Family background, home location and school sector also influenced VET in Schools participation. VET in Schools participants were more likely to have parents working in manual occupations. Students from an English-speaking language background were more likely than those from a non-English speaking background to participate in VET in Schools, as were those who lived outside metropolitan areas. Young people studying VET in Schools tended to be enrolled in government schools.

## Patterns of subject enrolments

Students who enrolled in VET had a different pattern of subject enrolments to those not enrolled in VET. Figure 2 shows the relationship between participation in VET and participation in key learning areas (KLAs) in Year 12 in 2001. VET students were less likely to be enrolled in mathematics, humanities and social sciences, languages other than English, and the biological sciences, and only about one-quarter as likely to study subjects in the physical sciences. These other subject clusters tend to be selected by students who intend to attend university.

The area in which enrolments by VET students outstrip those of other students is in the KLA of technology. In technical studies, home science and agriculture in particular, enrolments by the VET group are more than twice those of the non-VET group. In fact, most of the VET subjects are within these KLAs. These subject groups are associated with students who pursue VET pathways.

## Models of VET in Schools provision

There is great variation around Australia in the way VET subjects are delivered and recognised. Some jurisdictions stipulate that all VET subjects must be accredited and meet the requirements of the industry-specific training packages that are central to the AQF. Full AQF accreditation is not deemed essential by all systems, however, and there are some systems in which schools may offer VET subjects that are school-delivered and school-assessed only. In each system, some schools go to the very limit of what is possible, offering school-based apprenticeships and multi-strand VET in Schools programs that allow students to achieve recognised qualifications and obtain advanced credit in the VET pathway. Other schools provide ‘taster’ VET only,

and some schools provide no VET at all.

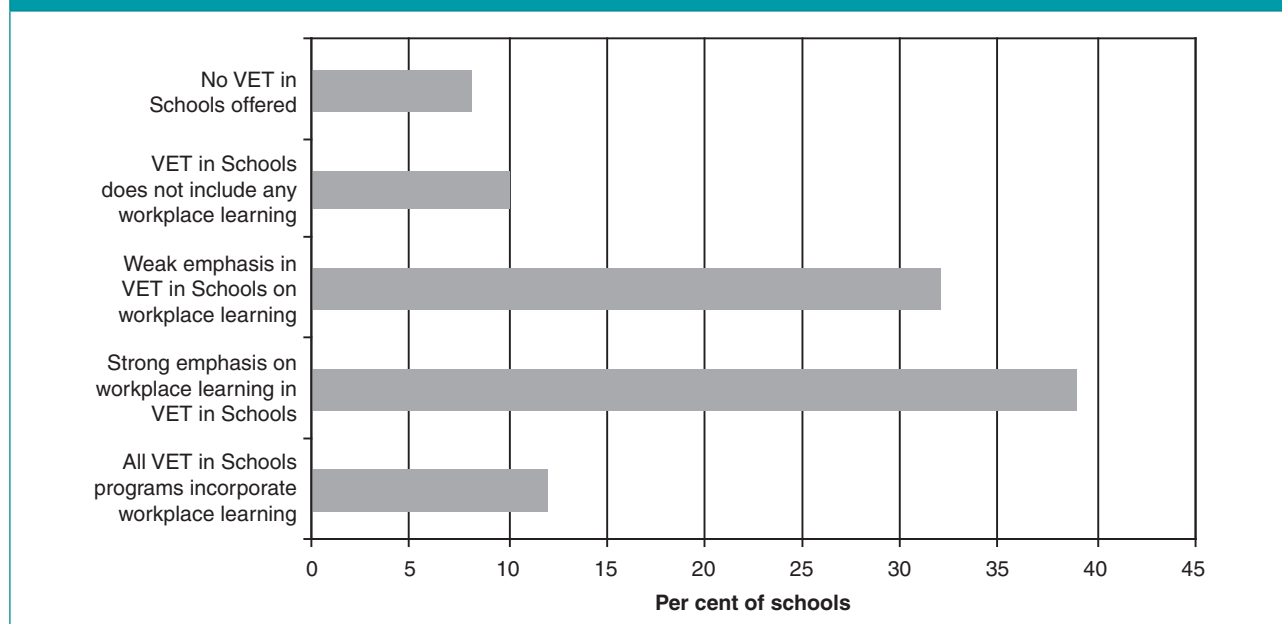
Workplace learning is an important part of VET in Schools; however, levels of participation in workplace learning vary considerably across schools (Figure 3). In 2000 and 2001, around 39 per cent of schools placed a strong emphasis on workplace learning, while 10 per cent offered no workplace learning in their VET in Schools programs. Only 12 per cent of schools incorporated workplace learning in all of their programs (Lamb & Vickers, 2006). These patterns may have changed somewhat in the intervening years as VET in Schools has become more fully incorporated into school programs.

## Impact of VET provision on year 12 completion

One of the objectives of introducing VET in Schools was to broaden the school curriculum to better meet the needs of students seeking VET careers. It was expected that this would, among other things, increase retention of students to the end of Year 12.

There is evidence from time series data that the availability of VET in Schools has over time improved

Figure 3 Emphasis on workplace learning



**Figure 4 Impact of VET in Schools on initial post-school activities**

VET in Schools has an impact on young people's participation in post-school employment and further study. Among members of the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort who had participated in VET in Schools programs:

- males were more likely to study computer sciences or trades, while females were more likely to be enrolled in travel and tourism or other personal service courses;
- there was a greater likelihood of undertaking apprenticeships or traineeships after school;
- unemployment rates in the first two years after Year 12 were similar to those who had not participated in VET in Schools, even though VET in Schools students tend to have the same characteristics as those who experience more difficult transitions into the labour force;
- VET in Schools was a stronger pathway to full-time employment for males than for females;
- studying VET in Schools for two years lessened the likelihood of participating in university for males, but increased the likelihood for females; and
- VET in Schools strengthened the pathway to employment for students with low levels of achievement in Year 9.

retention, with the strongest effect on retention to the end of Year 11 (Anlezark et al, 2006). Using the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort, Vickers and Lamb (2006) found that a higher percentage of VET in Schools participants than non-participants changed their mind between Year 9 and Year 12 about completing Year 12, suggesting that VET in Schools influenced the decision to stay on at school. They also found that the impact on retention appears to be stronger in schools where VET subjects count towards a Year 12 certificate, compared to schools where VET counts only towards an AQF qualification or no qualification at all.

## Destination after school of those who enrolled in VET in Schools

Leaving school after the completion of Year 11 and some VET study is more beneficial in terms of later education or employment than leaving after Year 11 with no VET study. Completing Year 12 provides even better outcomes, regardless of participation in VET study (Anlezark et al, 2006).

Staying at school to Year 12 and studying VET subjects also provides benefits for some students but not all. Young people from the 1998 Year 9 LSAY cohort who undertook service and clerical vocational studies-one

of the VET pathways followed mainly by young women-were less likely to participate in further education and training than those who undertook other combinations of subjects, and they were less likely to be working full-time after leaving school. Young people from the same cohort who had studied a program of technical vocational studies in Year 12 also experienced lower rates of participation in further education and training, but were more likely to be employed full-time (Thomson, 2005).

The effect of VET in Schools on post-school activities also depends on the composition of VET studies to the Year 12 certificate. If their schools offer a strong VET program with high levels of workplace learning, students are more likely to enter further VET study and are less likely to be unemployed.

## Summary

VET in Schools is a growing area of Australian senior secondary education. Almost all schools offering senior secondary programs now offer VET subjects, and the number of students taking them continues to rise. One Australian State-Victoria-recently introduced an alternative senior secondary certificate, the Certificate of Applied Learning, acknowledging the importance of this pathway for young people.

While the study of VET subjects in schools has increased, the general characteristics of the students taking these subjects have remained fairly constant. These characteristics have tended to be associated with early school leavers, which suggests that VET in Schools is providing alternatives and opportunities for people who might otherwise not remain at school to complete Year 12.

The way in which VET is incorporated into schools may also have an influence on student progress and outcomes. For VET in Schools programs to be effective, they must be seen to improve the pathways for young Australians who might otherwise be disadvantaged by the traditional university-oriented focus of senior secondary school. LSAY results suggest that VET in Schools is successfully providing a pathway either into a recognised form of post-secondary vocational education and training, including apprenticeships and traineeships, or into work without any further training. Participation in VET in Schools is much less likely to provide a pathway to university study.

VET in Schools participation is associated with an increase in the likelihood of young women entering post-compulsory education, but not necessarily for young men. For those in the lowest achievement quartiles, participation in VET in Schools leads to positive outcomes from the first to second year after completing school. For those students in the lowest two achievement quartiles and lowest two socioeconomic groups-those most at risk of ending up in economically precarious positions-participation in VET in Schools is associated with a successful transition to full-time employment and to similar levels of participation in further VET study as those who did not participate in VET in Schools.

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### The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth

The Longitudinal Surveys of The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) is a research program jointly managed by ACER and the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). Funding for LSAY is also provided by the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC) through the National Fund for Educational Research.

The program includes more than 20 years of data on young Australians

as they move through school and into tertiary education, the labour market and adult life. LSAY commenced in its present form in 1995 with a national sample of Year 9 students. Another sample of Year 9 students was drawn in 1998, and a further sample of 15 year olds was drawn in 2003. Data are first collected in schools, then by mail and telephone interviews.

Advice and guidance are provided by a Steering Committee, with representatives from DEST,

other Australian Government departments, AESOC, the Chief Executive Officers of State and Territory training authorities, non-government schools, academics and ACER.

The data collected through LSAY are deposited with the Australian Social Science Data Archive for access by other analysts.

Further information on the LSAY program is available from ACER's Website: [www.acer.edu.au](http://www.acer.edu.au)



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