EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The introduction of vocational education and training (VET) programs into secondary schools is a
significant development in Australian education. VET programs are intended to broaden the range of
curriculum offerings and provide young people with another pathway to work and tertiary education. A key
feature of the secondary VET programs in Australia is that they comply with the National Training
Framework and also form part of students' senior secondary certificate.

This report uses a substantial national data set to analyse the levels of participation in VET in Schools, the
characteristics of the young people who take VET programs, and their work and study activities after
leaving Year 12.

The Data: Strengths and Limitations

The results are based on data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), a
longitudinal survey of young Australians interviewed annually on their school experiences, and post-
school education, training and work activities. The sample comprised those students who were in
Year 9 in 1995. This report focuses on those sample members who completed Year 11 in 1997 and
Year 12 in 1998, and for whom data are available for the two years after completing Year 12. These
data, covering the period from 1995 to 2000, are available for around 6100 young people.

The report provides several features that have not been available before from the research literature
on VET in Schools.

- The data provide a national picture of participation and post-school activities, whereas most
  previous studies have concentrated on particular States.
- The sample provides a full representation of the national cohort of young people who were
  enrolled in Year 9 in 1995, and their activities since that time. Because the sample covers all
  of the cohort, it enables those who have done VET in Schools to be compared with those who
  have not.
- The longitudinal nature of the LSAY data enable allowance to be made for the social and
  educational backgrounds of the students who take up different options in Years 11 and 12,
  including VET in Schools.

Despite the considerable advantages offered by the LSAY data, they do have some limitations.
Firstly, the data about participation in VET in Schools are based on students' self-reports. Secondly,
although LSAY is a large sample, the estimates are subject to sampling error.

In addition to these limitations of the LSAY data set, there are two further challenges posed for any
study of VET in Schools.
There is great variety around Australia in the nature of the VET programs that are provided by secondary schools. The heterogeneity in the VET in Schools programs experienced by students requires caution in generalising about their impact.

At the present time most students taking VET programs spend relatively little time in that part of their curriculum. The limited amount of time involved suggests caution in attributing too much to the effect of VET participation on post-school activities.

Levels of Participation in VET in Schools

The report examines the participation rates in VET in Schools according to three aspects of student characteristics:

- social and educational background;
- education and work aspirations; and
- satisfaction with school.

Participation was measured from students' self-report data on whether they took any VET subjects in Year 11 or Year 12. VET participation was very limited for most students, however the characteristics outlined above were examined for four separate groups of students:

- those students who undertake no VET in Schools studies at all;
- those students who do some VET subjects in either Year 11 or 12;
- those students who take VET in Schools subjects in both Years 11 and 12; and
- those students who were undertaking a school-based new apprenticeship or traineeship.

Nationally, almost one-quarter of this group of students participated in some form of vocational education and training while at school.

- Fifteen per cent of students had undertaken some VET in Schools subjects at either Year 11 or Year 12;
- Seven per cent had completed subjects in both Year 11 and Year 12; and
- Slightly more than one per cent had participated in a school-based new apprenticeship or traineeship.

Characteristics of VET in Schools participants

Participation in VET in Schools varies considerably according to early school achievement, socioeconomic status, type of school attended and ethnic background. It is more likely for students from particular backgrounds to enrol in VET in Schools subjects. For example:

- Participation rates were highest amongst those students in the lowest achievement quartile, with 37 per cent of students participating in vocational education and training while at school compared to 14 per cent of those students in the highest achievement quartile;
- Participation rates were lower among those students whose family background is from a non-English speaking country (18 per cent as compared to 24 per cent from Australian-born parents);
- Parental background is an important factor in participation. Of the students whose parents had only completed secondary school, 25 per cent participated in vocational programs, compared to 14 per cent of those with tertiary educated parents. Similarly, of those students whose parents were in professional occupations, 15 per cent participated in vocational education, compared to 27 per cent of those whose parents were employed in manual occupations.
Participation rates were slightly higher in rural areas than in metropolitan areas (26 per cent compared to 21 per cent in urban areas).

The highest level of participation in vocational programs was found in Queensland (41 per cent) and the lowest level in Victoria (12 per cent).

Participation rates were higher among those with lower levels of engagement and satisfaction with school.

Participation in VET in Schools was more likely amongst those students who saw school as providing them with an opportunity to learn things that would be useful in adult life, however it was less likely amongst those students who saw themselves as successful at school.

There were no gender differences found in the level of participation, however there were gender differences in the types of vocational subjects studied by males and females.

Activities after Year 12

It is important to monitor outcomes of post-compulsory education and training. For continuing government, student and community support of VET in Schools programs there must be some evidence that such programs are a means of improving student outcomes, rather than simply a way of managing a diverse student population.

Earlier longitudinal data suggest that young people who spend an extended period of time in part-time work, unemployment or out of the labour force immediately after leaving school are likely to experience greater difficulties in finding full-time employment in their mid-20s. These findings suggest that one important criterion for judging the impact of VET in Schools is the extent to which that experience is associated with being in full-time work and/or formal education or training in the years immediately after completing Year 12. The current analysis identifies seven main post-school activities for the group:

- full-time work;
- further study at university;
- further study at TAFE;
- apprenticeship or traineeship;
- part-time work;
- unemployment;
- not in the labour force.

The report also examined outcomes in the first two years after completing secondary school and pathways between the main post-school activities for separate groups of students. While it is not possible from these data to attribute causality to participation in VET in Schools programs, some of the key findings were that:

- Unemployment rates were similar for the VET in Schools group and for the non-VET in Schools group.
- Participation in VET in Schools appears more likely to be a pathway to the labour force than to further education or training, more so for males than for females. For young females, participation in further education is at a much higher rate than for young males.
- For those in the lowest achievement quartile at Year 9, VET in Schools appears to act to improve the pathway to employment, but not to tertiary education. Participation in two years of VET in Schools appears to facilitate the achievement of positive labour and educational outcomes, particularly for young males.
- There is some evidence that VET in Schools is associated with a pathway either into a recognised form of post-secondary vocational education or training or work.
The results of this study underline the importance of monitoring participation and outcomes of participation in VET in Schools. In order to do so, it is important that the outcomes of those who do not participate in VET in Schools also be monitored, in order that some comparisons can be made. VET in Schools is still in its infancy. It is also perhaps the most substantial change that has occurred in post-compulsory study over the last decade. Offering students a range of options and pathways in their post-compulsory schooling suited to differing interests and needs of young people encourages a higher proportion to remain in education and training.