

Vocational Education and Training in Australia

Strengths, Challenges and Recommendations

STRENGTHS

Australia has a very well developed VET system, which enjoys a high degree of confidence. In particular:

- Engagement of employers is strong.
- The national qualification system is well established and understood.
- The VET system is flexible and allows for a fair amount of local autonomy and innovation to adapt learning to local circumstances.
- Data and research on most VET issues are good.

CHALLENGES

- The division of responsibilities between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments is unclear.
- Principles underpinning funding are not apparent and nor consistent with human capital policies and principles.
- The use of skills forecasting creates some difficulties.
- There are some weaknesses and gaps in the relevant data.
- Apprenticeships are rigid and seem to depend on duration rather than competence.
- Training package development and implementation processes are inefficient.
- The ageing of the teacher labour force is a serious problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Commonwealth, state and territory governments should seek to agree common principles for VET funding and provision and to achieve as much administrative consistency as possible, bearing in mind the appropriate interests of local democracy in a context of devolved government. Costs and benefits arising from local variations and from duplication of responsibilities should be quantified.
2. Students should be entitled to pursue VET qualifications without charge up to the level normally attained at the end of schooling, that is, up to Certificate II or III. Fees for higher-level VET qualifications should be levied on the same broad basis as for higher education and defrayed through HECS income-contingent loans.
3. Students entitled to funding should be able to choose VET providers. Open competition should be accompanied by support measures designed to ensure that a good range of provision is accessible to all, including disadvantaged groups, that better information is available to potential students on the quality of providers, and that different types of providers can compete on a fair basis.
4. Skills forecasts are often unreliable and should not be the foundation of central planning. In future, there should be more emphasis on a system driven by student demand balanced by employer willingness to offer workplace training.
5. A broader range of quality and outcome data at the provider level should be developed and made available. This will support student choice and provision driven by student demand. Data should become a systematic element of programme and policy decision making. Efforts should be made to fill the data gaps, including an extension of the Student Outcome Survey.
6. The commendable reforms that base apprenticeships on competencies now need to be translated into action, allowing flexibility in the length of apprenticeships and supporting that through a common procedure for their assessment. Costs and benefits of apprenticeships should be analysed, reforms should be evaluated and the

results used for policy planning. Ways of integrating apprentices into the production process earlier during their training should be explored.

7. Training packages should be replaced by simple and much briefer statements of skills standards. Consistency in standards throughout Australia should be achieved through a common assessment procedure to determine whether the necessary skills have been acquired.
8. Initiatives in which trainers work part-time in VET providers and part-time in industry should be encouraged. Innovative strategies are necessary to sustain the numbers and skills of the teacher and trainer labour force in providers. Better data on VET teachers and trainers should be systematically collected, published and used for planning and evaluation purposes.

FURTHER READING

Vocational education and training (VET) has a key economic function in up-skilling and integrating young people into the labour market and in providing high quality technical skills. But in recent decades, VET has been a neglected part of initial education: education policy research and reform have tended to focus primarily on school and tertiary education.

The OECD's policy review of vocational education and training (VET), *Learning for Jobs*, comprises a programme of analytical work and individual country reviews and is designed to help countries make their VET systems more responsive to labour market needs.

[Learning for Jobs, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training Policies, Australia](#) (OECD, 2008) was released in November 2008 and assesses the main challenges faced by the VET system and presents an interconnected package of eight policy recommendations. For each recommendation, the report describes the challenge, the recommendation itself, supporting arguments, and issues of implementation.

Further information about the policy review and reports on VET systems in other countries is available on the OECD website www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs