

# VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICY DIRECTIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE IN SCHOOLS

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## Abstract

Recent policy initiatives at both Federal and State levels have been aimed at broadening the participation of students in vocationally-oriented education during their final years of schooling. Programs currently in place at a range of schools include traineeships, New Apprenticeships, structured workplace learning schemes, work experience, TAFE studies, and school subjects with embedded TAFE modules. As part of a research project conducted by the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority (TEPA), schools implementing expanded vocational education programs were contacted to assess their practical responses to the updated policy directions. While the initial aim of the study was to investigate students' perceptions of vocationally-oriented education in senior school, a number of issues emerged relating to the implementation of education policy.

Based on the initial responses from program coordinators in Queensland schools, there appears to be some confusion about the role of different vocational programs in the overall educational experience and an absence of integrated implementation guidelines. It is also apparent that information is not always effectively disseminated to the full range of stakeholder groups including schools, students, parents, and employers. These topics will be explored with reference to the preliminary findings from the current TEPA research project.

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## Introduction

Recent policy initiatives at Federal, State and Territory levels have focussed on broadening the range of vocational education within schools and increasing the participation of students in post-compulsory education. The imperative to improve vocational education and training (VET) can be seen as a world-wide phenomenon where education, the economy and society are recurring themes which are seen as factors relevant to international competitiveness within the global economy (Cumming & Hardingham 1996:69, OCED 1998).

Australia's attention, through the late 1980s and the 1990s, to the reform of VET policy, as well as the reviews of education and training in schools and universities, is illustrated by a number of commentaries, reports and policy documents (Dawkins 1989; Finn 1991; Carmichael 1992; Mayer 1992; Wiltshire 1994; McGaw 1996, Cumming 1996, West 1997, Education Queensland 1998; EQ 1998; ANTA 1998a & b). In 1992 the establishment of the Australian

National Training Authority (ANTA) to formulate, develop and implement VET policy marked the commitment of the Federal government, at that time, to facilitate and coordinate VET reform. The recently released national strategy for VET 1998-2003 entitled *A Bridge to the Future* can be argued to be a culmination of policy development to this point of time (ANTA 1998b). Further, the national strategy states the intent of the ministers responsible to VET and is 'a collective commitment by Australian governments, in partnership with Australian industry, to vocational education and training' (ANTA 1998b, preface). Within this climate of consensus, Australian governments of all persuasions, and at all levels, have promoted in their VET policies the inclusion of school-based VET courses within the general education curriculum, especially in senior secondary school years.

Alongside this push for policy reform in the VET and education sectors, several other of the Federal Government's policy initiatives and funding arrangements are expected to impact on the traditional role and structure of education and schools. These policy initiatives include the introduction of the Common Youth Allowance, allowing under-18-year olds to be eligible for financial assistance only if they are in full-time education, the Job Pathways Program to encourage schools to assist non-university bound students into employment, and the Full Service for Students at Risk, commencing in 1999, to assist 'students at risk' to complete Year 12 and make a successful transition to work.

TEPA's (Tertiary Entrance Procedure Authority) initial interest in these policy directives was related to the possibility that undertaking VET-oriented studies may limit, rather than expand, tertiary post-school options and that a lack of information regarding the guidelines for program implementation at school level may result in confusion regarding post-school pathways. The aim of this paper is to report the findings of the preliminary phase of a longitudinal study which TEPA is carrying out, in Queensland's schools, to identify the effect of undertaking a vocationally-oriented senior secondary program on students' tertiary entrance pathways, students' post-school options, and how policy formulation and implementation affect students' options.

During preliminary discussions, in March and April 1998, with school coordinators in relation to school-based New Apprenticeships being introduced to Queensland schools, it became clear that, while policy had been developed at a macro level, the implementation and operationalisation of the policy at a school level was proving to be problematic. The issues raised by school coordinators during these discussions included how the lack of adequate operationalisation guidelines and knowledge of information sources constrained schools establishing the program and, thus, limited students' post-school options. The paper reports on the perception of school coordinators regarding school-based New Apprenticeships, at a specific point

of time (March–April 1998), and these findings are discussed in relation to the Federal and Queensland governments' policy objectives. For the purpose of this paper 'New Apprenticeship Scheme' refers to the macro policy while the term 'school-based New Apprenticeships' refers to micro level implementation of the program which includes both apprenticeship and traineeship categories.

## **Policy objectives**

### **Federal Government's objectives**

The recent VET policy initiatives have attempted to make VET more relevant to industry, which it is hoped will improve Australia's international competitiveness and enhance the life chances of individuals. These initiatives recognise the need to address the technological advances which have transformed service and knowledge-based industries (ANTA 1998b). The national strategy sets out the vision for VET for the years 1998–2003 and states five objectives (ANTA 1998b) within the principles of 'flexibility', 'accountability' and 'accessibility' (ANTA 1998a:1). These factors are discussed linking the objective to expected outcomes:

- to equip Australians for the continually changing labour market which requires 'building the national stock of skills to an internationally competitive level' (ANTA 1998b: 5). Thus the need to provide multiple and diverse pathways to encourage workers to undertake VET programs that are responsive to the needs of industry. This objective is expected to result in the expansion of pathways and options for all individuals and, thus, a reduction in unemployment, increased opportunities for school students, the provision of a potential source of new skills with individuals achieving nationally recognised qualifications; and the promotion of the value of life-long learning to adapt to the rapidly changing technological skills needed by industry;
- to promote the mobility of individuals in the workforce through the recognition by all States and Territories of nationally accredited VET qualifications offered by nationally registered providers. Further these nationally recognised qualifications would allow 'seamless' pathways through clear articulation arrangements between schools, TAFE institutes, other registered providers and tertiary institutions;
- to achieve equitable outcomes for those individuals undertaking VET, it is stated that the policy, planning, funding and delivery mechanisms require to be inclusive of all needs. Mention is made of the need to identify and remove structural and other barriers to improve access to, and outcomes for, people identified as disadvantaged. An example given is to provide information technology for those in rural and remote areas to access training packages;

- to increase investment in VET so that the economic imperative to build the national stock of skills in Australia is addressed. The investment of \$7 billion annually in VET is aimed at, internationally, securing Australia as a leading international position and improving Australia's skills profile against relevant benchmark countries; and, nationally, developing and encouraging a societal attitude which values learning and the development of skills in the VET area. The outcomes mentioned include an increased number of Australians holding formal qualifications, increased international competitiveness due to a highly skilled workforce in comparison to other OCED countries, and an increased participation in post-school education and training resulting in vocational training becoming an universal experience and valued as part of the workforce culture in Australia (ANTA 1998b:17); and, finally,
- to maximise the value of public VET expenditure through using the infrastructure effectively, assuring accountability, and improving management information resulting in the States and Territories continually identifying growth derived from efficiencies. Further ongoing research into VET and evaluation of major initiatives are to be used for 'continuous improvements and future policy and program development' (ANTA 1998:22).

While these broad policy objectives relating to the New Apprenticeship Scheme do not specifically mention the school-based New Apprenticeships, the allocation of VET funds of \$80 million, over four calendar years (1997–2000), providing \$20 million per annum to school authorities for the development of the school-based New Apprenticeships illustrates the national commitment (ANTA 1998a:1). It can be argued, therefore, that although inclusion of the school-based New Apprenticeships initiative can be seen to be subsumed within the overarching policy initiatives and objectives, school-based education and training is seen as a key factor in improving the Australian economy in the long term. While all States and Territories have shown a commitment to the Federal policy each has developed its own policies and, for the purpose of this paper, the Queensland experience will be discussed.

### **Queensland State Government's objectives**

The factors which the former Queensland Coalition Government's policy initiatives aimed to address through the implementation of school-based New Apprenticeships are set out in the document *Stepping Stones to Success*, a Joint Statement by the Minister for Education (The Honourable Bob Quinn) and The Minister for Training and Industrial Relations (The Honourable Santo Santoro) (Queensland Government 1998). These objectives and outcomes, discussed below, include:

- the need to develop an appropriate curriculum for non-university-bound students which has 'meaningful and recognised outcomes' such as nationally recognised qualifications (Queensland Government 1998:5). Although the increased retention rates for post-compulsory years in the late 1980s and 1990s (ABS 1996) is now reported to be declining (ABS 1998) 70% of the senior secondary school student population is non-university-bound (ANTA 1997) , the need to maintain retention rates and provide an appropriate curriculum for the majority of students during senior secondary school years appears to be a Federal, as well as State, government priority;
- the need to provide students leaving school with a broader range of skills and qualifications resulting in wider opportunities and choice of multiple pathways to the workforce, full-time apprenticeships, and further education and training. The inclusion of VET programs can be linked to research which reports that school-leavers without qualifications have higher unemployment levels compared to those who do, are more likely to have a low paid job, and are less likely to participate in further education or training (ANTA 1998b:6). It is also reported that opportunities for post-school students increased where the quality and relevance of the programs in institutions were adopted (ANTA 1998b:6);
- the need to raise the profile of VET in the senior secondary years of schooling to contribute to the improvement of workforce skills in Queensland, thus, increasing economic competitiveness. This addresses the recognition that there is a need to promote the value of life-long learning as a strategy to cope with the rapidly changing economic, social, cultural and political world of the future (Queensland Government 1998:3).

These objectives and outcomes, it is argued, will assist students' transition between senior secondary school and the workforce, maximise young people's employment opportunities, permit students to experience learning in applied contexts, and allow the accommodation of a broad range of teaching and learning styles within the school system (Queensland Government 1998:5).

Thus, the Federal push for the development of policy relating to school-based VET, and to which all State and Territory governments are committed, can be argued to be a response to 'changes in economic, industrial and social forces' (ANTA 1998b:1). An essential ingredient of reform required to meet these educational, economic, social, political and cultural objectives can be argued to be the introduction of school-based VET as part of the general education curriculum. However, this shift in emphasis of senior secondary schools' educational role requires the practical application of 'convergence' between general and VET curricula (Cumming 1996) and the 'seamless' articulation of

recognised national qualifications between States and Territories as well as education sectors (Queensland Government 1998). These policy initiatives can be argued to change the traditional modus operandum of schools within the social, economic and cultural environment.

## **The Queensland experience**

The recognition of the need to integrate general and vocational education in Queensland's schools can be seen to be endorsed by the State Government firstly, by the report *Shaping the future* (Wiltshire 1994); secondly, by the setting up of a Task Group on post-compulsory schooling (1996), chaired by Professor Alan Cumming, to report to the Minister for Education and Minister for Training and Industrial Relations with regard to the issues and impact of this policy direction; and thirdly, development by the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (BSSSS) of 18 Board subjects by the year 2001, to include embedded and nationally accredited VET modules. Further, the 1998 Queensland Annual VET Plan (DTIR 1998) and the report entitled *Stepping Stones to Success* (Queensland Government 1998) address Queensland's commitment to school-based vocational training, especially the establishment of the school-based New Apprenticeships.

Queensland government immediately launched the school-based New Apprenticeships in 1997, in contrast to most other States in Australia. The program was firstly, 'piloted' in 1997 in seven Queensland schools and in 1998 the funding for school-based New Apprenticeships was open to all Queensland schools. It can be argued that the implementation of Federal policy at a state level has been characterised by 'incremental steps' using a 'bottom-up' approach (Ham & Hill 1984). The development of school-based New Apprenticeships to some extent mirrored the highly devolutionary system already operating within the Queensland education system which allows school-based management the flexibility to develop programs appropriate to their individual circumstances (TEPA Forum 1998). The New Apprenticeship Steering Committee consisting of state and non-state education representatives was set up to oversee, coordinate and evaluate the school-based New Apprenticeship pilot scheme in 1997 and the full program development in 1998.

However, the effectiveness and utility of these programs are not only dependent on the policy developed at Federal and State Government levels but on the operationalisation of such policies at school and community level. While there had been a series of state wide workshops in 1997 giving information and launching the school-based New Apprenticeships, schools attempting to implement the program at the beginning of 1998 had few documents to guide development and implementation. The documents developed from the information obtained from the 1997 'pilot' programs were not available until April 1998. Schools seeking information and operational

guidelines at this time, therefore, relied on a number of Federal, State and quasi-government departments, registered training groups and providers and organisations in the industrial sector to obtain advice and procedural assistance.

Schools were thrust into a world where they had to act in the role of experts in the field of:

- legal matters (contractual arrangements for trainees and school-based apprentices, occupational and health regulations);
- industrial relations negotiators (union regulations);
- employment agents (Job Pathways Program);
- free-market consumers and competitors (National Competition Policy which promotes the growth of private agencies to service the school and industrial link);
- social control agents (Services for 'at risk' students and the changes in the eligibility for the Common Youth Allowance); and
- information disseminators.

Concerns were expressed with regard to the 'mesh of initiatives' and the uncoordinated and partisan nature of the information sources (TEPA Forum 1998).

It can be argued that the existence of only an overarching macro policy, the immediate implementation of a school-based New Apprenticeships 'pilot' program with few operationalisation guidelines, allows a bottom-up model (Ham & Hill 1984) of development and implementation to be established, and this model of policy development provides the flexibility and structuring of programs, to the needs of specific school, community and industrial environments. However, not only the Federal and State funding but also the social and economic resources in the community within which the school is situated are crucial for the success of the school-based vocational programs .

## **Findings**

The following findings are a summary of preliminary discussions with VET coordinators in Queensland schools which had applied for seed funding from Education Queensland (Form A) to develop apprenticeship programs under the school-based New Apprenticeship policy initiative. Some of these schools were contacted by telephone during March and April 1998 and notes made of the issues raised. The discussions took place prior to the schools' applying for the second round of consolidation funding (Form B) for those school-based New Apprenticeships which had been developed.

Of the 39 Government, four Catholic and four independent schools identified as developing apprenticeship programs 19 schools (15 government, two Catholic, two independent) were contacted. These schools illustrated the following characteristics: locations included rural, remote, regional, provincial and capital city; gender included mixed and single sex; and the governing organisation consisted of independent and government schools. While there is a wide range of stakeholders within the school-based New Apprenticeship field this research reports on the findings from the perspective of school coordinators. From the perspective of school coordinators it was reported that the ability of schools to implement school-based New Apprenticeships was constrained, to a greater or lesser extent, by:

- the lack of coordinated and consistent information and advice;
- the ambiguity of terminology relating to categories of VET;
- the utility of the various implementation models;
- the rapidly changing purpose of education resulting in changing roles and responsibilities in the school sector; and
- the short-term funding schemes for long-term commitment to the programs.

All schools, whether or not they had been successful in developing school-based New Apprenticeships, were positive about the introduction of VET programs in schools. The issues which they raised will be discussed in relation to how they were perceived to facilitate or constrain the development of the school-based New Apprenticeships. However, while there was some consistency in the themes which emerged from the research, the findings should not be generalised to a wider population of schools nor be generalised to all stakeholders in the VET arena.

### **Coordination of information and advice**

Immediately prior to the introduction of the school-based New Apprenticeships, the BSSSS in Queensland had been largely responsible for the dissemination of information and the development of vocational programs in Queensland schools. Due to the introduction of school-based New Apprenticeships the 'one stop shop' concept and responsibility for school-based vocational education was challenged by TAFE and private training providers, although BSSSS still maintains responsibility for course and subject accreditation via Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission (VETEC). There appeared to be no single body whose task was to provide coordinated information and advice to schools. Often information with regard to vocational opportunities, new initiatives and funding arrangements were first sighted in newspapers or schools were approached by the growing number of private agencies in their regions. Schools were concerned that there was no sector-neutral organisation with a brief to provide information about the range of options, pathways and



diversity of funding, nor advice regarding the delivery services of private training providers within the evolving competitive marketplace.

Throughout 1997 and early 1998, there had been a proliferation of pamphlets, leaflets, booklets and newspaper articles describing and publicising the New Apprenticeship Scheme. While this information was published and distributed mainly by ANTA and Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA), information was distributed also at state level by the then Department of Training and Industrial Relations (DTIR) and Education Queensland (EQ), and at national level by the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF). However, the schools reported that they found the information distributed uncoordinated and confusing as each document used different terminology or the same terminology which appeared to be defined in inconsistent ways. This factor, together with the rapidity of change with regard to organisational responsibilities, created difficulties for the stakeholders to digest information and evaluate the different roles and responsibilities. Although there appeared to be an 'overload' of information publicising the programs and new initiatives, the schools' concern was the lack of advice regarding infra-structural models and procedural arrangements for the implementation of the schemes at school and community levels. (As stated the Education Queensland Guidelines were not available until April 1998.) Further, even when the appropriate agencies were accessed it was reported there appeared very little coordination or consistency in the advice and information schools received.

It was also stated that the rapid evolution and development of VET senior secondary and post-school options and pathways emphasised the growing tension between the perceived inadequacy of career and further education advice and information for students taking VET options in comparison to the information and advice available for university-bound students. The multiplicity of agencies and organisations involved in the VET area, as well as the need to articulate the multiple opportunities in career, further education and training options, appeared to be uncoordinated and inadequate.

The lack of a coordinated approach to publicising school-based New Apprenticeships to the various stakeholders, as well as the variations in terminology resulted in a lack of clearly articulated information and advice which could have assisted the schools in the implementation of the school-based program as well as in their communication with employers, registered training organisations, parents and students.

### **Ambiguity of terminology**

A large number of schools expressed concern about the confusion some parents and employers experienced in attempting to understand the various titles of courses and terms given to work experience and training activities. It

was noted by the researcher that, when discussing school-based New Apprenticeships, traineeships and apprenticeships categories were used interchangeably by the schools.

While in the *Vocational Education, Training and Employment Act (Qld) 1991* it is stated that the category 'trainee' includes apprentice, in communications with Education Queensland and the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations (DETIR), as well as ANTA, the term 'apprentice' is taken to include 'trainee'. This interchangeability of the terminology relating to 'apprentice' and 'trainee' categories was clarified, to some extent, after April 1998 by an EQ statement that 'the generic title of "New Apprenticeships" [should] refer to both apprenticeships and traineeships' with the recognition, however, that 'many employers continue to use the terms in their traditional sense' (EQ 1998:4). This lack of a separate definition for each program has evolved, to some extent, from the extension of former policies such as Modern Australian Apprenticeship Traineeship System (MAATS) and the development of new initiatives such as the New Apprenticeship Scheme and the school-based New Apprenticeships. While there has been an attempt to clarify and simplify the terminology at a macro policy level by including 'traineeships' and 'apprenticeships' under one umbrella termed 'New Apprenticeships' the ambiguity persists at the micro level of implementation. The two categories at school level are perceived to have a different length of training, result in different qualifications and outcomes and, therefore, are characterised as two distinct programs although qualifications are assessed using competency-based standards.

Thus, attempting to simplify the terminology at a macro level, while at a micro level the same distinctions between the programs exist in their implementation and outcome, results in confusion for parents, students and employers.

### **Developing models of implementation for the school-based New Apprenticeships**

Those schools which had established links with industrial and employer organisations, due to their long tradition of offering VET courses to their students, were more successful in negotiating the multiplicity of government, non-government, industrial and educational agencies involved in the school-based New Apprenticeships, compared to those schools without previous experience. However, not only previous experience but also the method used to link schools, employers, registered training providers and students appeared to be a significant factor with regard to the success of establishing the school-based New Apprenticeships for students.

Three models of organisation emerged from the research and these included:

- individual schools which had established a management committee consisting of local employer representatives, vocational school teachers, and local registered training providers and which had allocated some hours a week for a teacher to coordinate the program;
- a number of schools in a region which had joined together to form a cluster, outsourcing the role of community coordinator to a private agency which linked the school, the student, the employer and the registered training provider; and
- individual schools which attempted to deal directly with stakeholders in the community or were registered as training providers and had appointed a Deputy Principal to oversee a number of teachers within the school dealing with a particular vocational area and to liaise with employers and registered training providers in the community.

The models used in the linking of school to the community, the student to the employer, and the student and employer to training provider illustrated a flexibility which appeared appropriate to the circumstances of a particular school. However, the models adopted appeared to be a product of resources of a specific school and community and, to a great extent, these factors impacted on the school's ability to provide school-based New Apprenticeships.

Those schools located in an economically viable community which had engaged a coordinator based in the community, belonged to a cluster of schools, as well as those individual schools which had a tradition of vocational education, appeared to be better equipped to develop programs. The schools located in communities with heavy, service and retail industries appeared to be well served by private agencies, an extensive pool of employers and nationally registered training providers. Those schools which had outsourced the service requirements for the establishment of the school-based New Apprenticeships appeared to have developed a model in which the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders were more clearly differentiated and the expertise and resource allocation required more appropriately distributed.

However, the fragility of the development of the school-based New Apprenticeships can be illustrated by the difficulties expressed by some of the 15 government schools which had received seed funding but which, at the time of the data collection in March and April 1998, had no apprenticeship programs developed. While, in some cases, this was due to the inability of their coordination models to link effectively, students, employers and training providers within the limited time frame, in others cases, lack of school and community resources were important factors.

Those schools in disadvantaged economic communities, or situated in rural and remote locations, reported difficulty in establishing any workplace programs. The difficulties reported included lack of businesses able to take students in the local community, lack of human resources resulting in one teacher attempting to coordinate the program while doing other duties, the lack of private agencies to whom they could outsource the work, the remoteness of the school and the absence of nationally registered training providers, and the lack of motivation in a 'welfare-based' community. The lack of resources both within the school and the community inhibited most of these schools from establishing 'traineeships' or 'apprenticeships', although a large number of students enrolled were non-university-bound. In a number of these schools students had returned in Year 11 to begin school-based New Apprenticeships which by April 1998 had not been established.

However, a number of innovative models had developed in schools which previously had few direct links with industry or employers in the community. These strategies included establishing 'traineeships' or 'apprenticeships' through the students' parents or using parents' networks to link the school to potential employers, and formalising a student's part-time employment arrangement to include 'traineeship' or 'apprenticeship' status. However, in some of these cases, the process of linking the students and employers to nationally registered training providers and developing suitable training packages had proved problematic.

Thus, the type of model used to link schools and students with employers and nationally accredited training providers appeared to impact on the ability of schools to establish trainee and apprentice programs under school-based New Apprenticeship initiative. The model used appeared either to constrain or facilitate the development of community links, although the location of the school and the resources in the community were also important factors. However, all schools, whether or not they had been successful in establishing the 'traineeships' and 'apprenticeships', were positive in endorsing the introduction of school-based New Apprenticeships, but were concerned about the changing direction of education and training and the changing roles and responsibilities this would entail.

### **Purpose of education and training in schools, and changing roles and responsibilities in the school sector**

The traditional structure of schools and roles and responsibilities of teachers, to some extent, were reported as constraints to the changing purpose of education toward VET and the introduction of the school-based New Apprenticeships. The issues raised included the entrenched structure of resources (staff and funding) allocated between general education and VET and the community's and teachers' traditional perception of the role, responsibilities and purpose of school with regard to general education.

The traditional funding and staffing arrangements were cited as problematic. These two factors have mirrored, to a great extent, the traditional educational methods and courses offered to university-bound students in senior secondary school years. All schools expressed concern with regard to the difficulties in transferring resources to the VET programs from these academic courses, especially in those schools which did not have a tradition of offering a range of VET subjects. It was noted, therefore, that schools, which had offered VET programs for some time were in a better position than those schools embarking on the programs. Thus, it appeared that those schools which attempted changes without long-term planning were at a disadvantage when attempting to establish school-based New Apprenticeships.

Timetabling and resistance from some general education teachers appeared also to be constraints to schools wishing to 'converge' vocational and general education. However, all schools expressed difficulties in operationalising 'convergence' of VET courses with the general curriculum in practice (Cumming 1996), accessing advice on the articulation of qualifications to provide a 'seamless' transition between school, TAFE and other tertiary institutions (EQ 1998), and obtaining advice and information for students about the 'multiple pathways' and post-school options the new curriculum would provide.

One school, where 85 per cent of Years 11 and 12 students were taking at least one vocational subject, reported a 'total commitment' to a model of 'convergence'. However, the majority of schools contacted were unable to reconcile the two models and were using 'streaming'. All schools also expressed reservations about their ability to reconcile the different methods of assessment—criteria-based assessment of general education subjects and competency standards relating to the nationally accredited VET courses including school-based New Apprenticeships. The rapidity of changes and the lack of practical experience with regard to the model of convergence which relied on new timetabling and reconciling two differing assessment styles was argued in the short term to constrain development of school-based VET. However, it was noted that the use of a particular model (convergence or streaming) was determined, to some extent, by the purpose for which schools utilised VET programs in general and for school-based New Apprenticeships in particular.

The schools surveyed appeared to use VET programs for multiple purposes which had varied outcomes for the students. The purposes and outcomes for students included:

- to acquire general experience in the workforce, to widen knowledge of the working environment;
- to provide opportunities to experience different work situations, to assist in career choices ('try before you buy');

- to satisfy the requirements of a particular BSSSS subject module or Study Area Specification (SAS) subject;
- to achieve recognised national qualifications and/or apprenticeship status, through structured industrial placements and training with a registered provider;
- in a few cases, to widen students' pathways options to tertiary (university or diploma level TAFE) education through utilising the ranking mechanism, thus side stepping the Overall Position/Field Position (OP/FP) system, the more traditional pathway; and
- in a few schools to offer courses for the less able students.

Also school-based New Apprenticeships introduced the new dimension of students being paid for work and training while at school and, thus, a different status of student and a change in the responsibilities and roles of both teachers and students.

Most of the schools were concerned at the lack of staffing and funding resources to develop a sound VET program and school-based New Apprenticeships in their schools. The issues raised included lack of staffing resources for a teacher to coordinate adequately the VET courses; the inexperience of staff to write grant and funding submissions for financial assistance; and the lack of time and resources for teachers to upgrade their vocational training qualifications. The tripartite system of roles and responsibilities distributed to the school, employer and training provider, with regard to training, education and employment of apprentices and trainees, resulted in concern being expressed in relation to the school's 'duty of care'. Further other concerns were raised which included accountability with regard to teaching quality, health and safety, the accuracy of advice and information schools could give to these students, and the long-term responsibility to apprenticed students after Year 12 when they were no longer at school. Even though some schools had outsourced these roles and responsibilities to private agencies, all schools stated that the changed roles and responsibilities of those located in the school required greater clarification.

Thus to change the organisation, structure, roles and responsibilities of schools to encourage the development of vocational education and specifically the school-based New Apprenticeships, resulting in the practical application of convergence of curricula and seamless articulation of achievement, it was argued, required long-term planning and long-term resourcing arrangements.

### **Funding arrangements**

The Federal policy initiatives, relating to the school-based New Apprenticeships are funded through various government organisations: the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) funds some VET

coordinators; ANTA, DEETYA and State Training Authorities (STA) provide funds to government and non-government education systems for the establishment of the school-based New Apprenticeships and 'off the job' expenses; and the employers' subsidies are from Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations (DETIR). This method of funding has allowed a multiplicity of funding arrangements which are open to schools and private organisations. The funding arrangements, it is argued, has produced a demand for 'school-industries link', including the school-based New Apprenticeships, which is driven by Federal funding arrangements through schools rather than demand from industry.

In Queensland there are three stages in place for schools to secure school-based New Apprenticeships funding: the initial seed funding (Form A), consolidated funding (Form B) and, finally, Form C which sets out the expenses incurred by the registered training provider. The initial seed funding of between \$500 and \$1,000 (level being determined by locality areas) is approved by EQ when a school-industry links management committee is established, a coordinator has been appointed, community skills and employment needs and relevant traineeships/apprenticeships in the community have been identified (EQ 1998), and confirmation of the number of students and employers interested, as well as industrial relations arrangements being identified. In April 1998, when schools were about to apply for consolidation funding, there appeared to be some misconceptions with regard to the processes and conditions attached to the funding arrangements. For instance, some schools which had failed to establish apprenticeships were under the impression that they would have to return the seed funding, although this was not the case. Other schools which had established apprenticeships expressed anxiety about the lack of clearly articulated funding arrangements in relation to payment for the 'off the job' component undertaken by registered training providers.

All the schools contacted also expressed concern with regard to the long term commitment of governments to fund the scheme. The short-term allocation of funding by tendering, within Queensland, did not equate with the need schools have for a long-term commitment to the establishment of the school-based New Apprenticeships. Nor did the funding give security to the stakeholders who had made a long-term commitment to the indentured apprenticeship. These concerns, together with the feeling of uncertainty caused by the anticipated Federal and Queensland State Government elections, were stated as factors which caused the schools to be cautious in the development of school-based New Apprenticeships.

The schools which had joined a cluster and employed a coordinator through ASTF funding reported that, while this allowed a reduction of the extra responsibilities and roles for school coordinators, the short-term funding arrangements resulted in temporary contracts, the absence of 'normal

benefits' and therefore insecurity for the coordinator, and the lack of one identifiable employer had legal ramifications. These factors resulted in an inherently unstable system which threatened the long-term planning and commitment needed. This concern relating to instability was also expressed by some schools which had joined a cluster and which used private agencies. These private agencies had gained short-term funding through competitive tending and this, it was argued, also caused instability as 'short-term funding resulted in no long-term certainty'.

Further, schools expressed the fear that the fixed funding arrangements (allocation of funding through Forms A, B and C), while the private agencies had no such restrictions with regard to expenses and costs may result in schools incurring costs greater than the allocated funds. They believed there were two economic structures operating which were difficult to reconcile and could result in extra costs being borne by schools.

The preliminary findings of this research illustrate the difficulties which all schools experienced whether or not they had been successful in establishing the school-based New Apprenticeships. The consistent themes which caused concern were the lack of consistent and easily accessible information and advice, especially in relation to operationalising the programs at the school and community level, the confusion caused by the ambiguous and incompatible usage of terminology between and within stakeholder groups, the 'trial and error' approach to implementing school-industry link models without a clearly articulated pro forma, the development of VET in schools being limited by the traditional resource structures and organisations within the schools and the communities, and short-term funding arrangements for long-term commitments.

## **Discussion**

It can be argued that the findings illustrated the consequences of the rapid changes schools were required to adopt if they were to establish school-based New Apprenticeships between January and April 1998. While the macro policy initiatives were set out and publicised by ANTA and DEETYA and a large number of pamphlets were available from the various government and non-government organisations these were uncoordinated and lacked operational instructions. Access to information and advice was, therefore, a determining factor with regard to the effective and efficient establishment of school-based New Apprenticeships. This lack of coordination of advice to stakeholders, and the absence of operationalising instructions and guides to infra-structural arrangements, resulted in an inability to access information and advice. While this has been alleviated to some extent by EQ's publication of the *New Apprenticeship in Schools, User Guide* published in April 1998, it can be argued that confusion was caused by the rapid development of macro policy initiatives, the decision by Queensland to immediately implement the



school-based New Apprenticeships, and the relatively slow development of the operationalisation guidelines and coherent infrastructural information at a state and school micro level. While the lack of prescriptive guidelines allowed 'flexibility' in relation to the development of appropriate models at a local level (ANTA 1998a:1) it can be argued also that students' pathways and post-school options were limited, at least in the short term as far as school-based New Apprenticeships were concerned.

Those schools which were successful in establishing school-based New Apprenticeships had a strong and long-term tradition of providing VET programs to their students. These schools already had an organisational structure which allowed some flexibility of timetabling and staffing between the traditional general education courses and the VET subjects. While in all schools contacted the coordinator stated that the needs of the majority of students, i.e. the non-university-bound, should be catered for, the traditional mission of schools to prepare students for higher education (Sweet 1996:22) and the embedded dichotomy of general education and vocational education and training (Hager 1994) limited the ability to transfer resources. Thus, the embeddedness of the traditional purposes of education and the general educational roles and responsibilities of teachers in a particular school limited resources for the implementation of school-based New Apprenticeships and the development of a highly valued training culture within the schools (Wiltshire 1997,1998; ANTA 1998b).

Also, these structural and cultural factors could be argued to determine the ability of schools to embrace the 'convergence' model of general and VET curricula and the 'seamless' articulation of qualifications which are goals which underpinned the current educational reform (Cumming 1996, EQ 1998a). It is argued that co-operation and coordination is required, not only within schools, but also between educational 'precincts', for the development of an education plan, resources and consistency of assessment required to achieve convergence and 'seamless continuum of education and training' (Diplock 1996:62-3). According to Cumming & Carbines (1997:17,18) '...there is no single answer to the question of whether school reform precedes or follows the introduction of workplace learning...' and '... school reform and workplace learning are multi-faceted activities requiring long-term planning and development'. The findings of this research illustrated that, in the short term, the constraints caused by the organisational and resource structure of schools threatened the opportunities of senior secondary schools students, due to the inflexible nature of the traditional resourcing arrangements.

The establishment of school-based New Apprenticeships not only requires changes in the way schools are organised but also how schools interact with the community in which they are located (Sweet 1996:27). Those schools in economically viable locations and/or which had previous 'school to work' links to employers appeared to be in a good position to establish school-based

New Apprenticeships. In comparison, schools in remote, rural or declining economic locations found difficulty in accessing private industry-school link agencies, nationally registered training providers, and suitable employment and training experiences for potential apprentices and trainees. Thus, the lack of community resources impacted on the ability of these schools to provide vocational educational and training programs in general and school-based New Apprenticeships in particular. While the differing models of implementation encouraged by the lack of specific guidelines allowed the flexibility for schools to establish a model which was appropriate to their circumstances this did not address disadvantages experienced by some schools. It can be argued that the location of a particular school determined not only the model of implementation but also the ability of schools to provide the programs.

The location of the school and the economic climate in the community have ramifications in relation to equity issues with regard to the ability of student to access an employer (Diplock 1996:61), as well as for an employer exercising user choice in accessing a nationally accredited training provider. This poses some students with equity problems such as limited access to VET programs including school-based New Apprenticeships and constraints as far as outcomes in relation to opportunities to pursue multiple pathways and post-school options.

While recent policy documents from ANTA (1998b) and the Queensland Government (1998) state that equity issues are important and this is addressed by the provision of extra seed funding (\$750 and \$1,000 respectively) for students in remote and extremely remote areas (EQ 1998), the funding arrangements can neither address the lack of employment opportunities in a specific location nor, in the long term, the finite number of employment opportunities for students.

For the most part schools reported that Federal funding had allowed a 'demand' for apprenticeships and traineeships to develop from students and only those schools with traditional 'school to work' links stated some demand from employers. The introduction of the \$1,250 incentive, in May 1998, to employers who engage an indentured apprentice may increase demand from the employers' sector in future (EQ 1998:7). However, for the most part, the desire of the schools contacted to provide a diverse range of VET opportunities for students was the driving force behind the implementation of school-based New Apprenticeships. The effective partnership between schools, industries and nationally registered providers required for the success of school-based New Apprenticeships (Dompietro 1996:47), it can be argued, was compromised by the lack of adequate long-term funding, resulting in the instability of short-term contracts for long-term commitments.

## **Conclusion**

It can be argued that the principles underpinning the New Apprenticeship Scheme of flexibility, accountability and accessibility in the short-term have been compromised due to the rapidity of educational policy reform at a macro level. The speed of change resulted in some schools without prior experience being disadvantaged as far as implementing school-based New Apprenticeships. The lag, therefore, between the launching of the policy at a Federal level, together with the immediate availability of Federal funding, Queensland's decision to introduce the initiative immediately, and the slower development of a coherent and clearly articulated operational guidelines at a state or micro level (EQ 1998b), to some extent exacerbated all schools' ability to implement school-based New Apprenticeships to a greater or lesser extent.

The Federal funding arrangements have resulted in the proliferation of private school-industry link agencies and private VET agencies, although not in economically disadvantaged areas. This has led to inequitable situations and a demand for apprenticeships and traineeships from schools in the short term, rather than from the local employers. The multiplicity of funding arrangements not only for specific programs (school-based New Apprenticeships), but also single funding arrangements for others (Job Pathways, Common Youth Allowance) causes confusion within the system.

The Federal Government's objectives and expected outcomes which, to some extent, are mirrored by those stated by EQ, illustrate the political imperative of increasing international and national economic competitiveness through school-industry programs particularly school-based New Apprenticeships. However, these macro policy initiatives have to be practically applied at a school level and that requires long-term planning and development to allow increased student participation and, therefore, broadening students' options and opportunities post-school. Thus, it can be argued, that at the time of this research, the incongruence between the rapid changes in macro policy, together with short-term funding arrangements, and the need for school to develop long-term plans to bring about the reform at a school level, impacted on the school's ability to provide wider opportunities for senior secondary school students.

### **Future directions**

The paper reports on a unidimensional perspective (school coordinators) during a four-week point of time (March-April 1998) in the development of the implementation of school-based New Apprenticeships in Queensland's schools. However, the area of VET in schools is multi-dimensional and in the next phases a wider perspective will be researched. This longitudinal project (1998-2000) intends, in the next phases, to identify the effect of undertaking a vocationally-oriented senior secondary program on students' tertiary pathways and post-school options. The research also aims to examine from the perception of other stakeholders (employers, school coordinators, training

providers) the expectations and outcomes for VET students from their perspective. While in this paper the focus was on the development of school-based New Apprenticeships, students taking at least one vocational subject are to be interviewed as part of the future research. It is hoped that in this way the research will be able to cover a continuum of VET experiences at school and outcomes post-school. Interviews will take place with all respondents when the students are in Year 11, Year 12 and when they have left school.

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