STUDENTS 15 TO 19 YEARS OLD

A champion is needed to drive change. We need a strong mandate from the Centre to support and reward innovation and change.

(Youth Interagency Taskforce)

INTRODUCTION

In New South Wales, the school leaving age is 15 and most students stay at school until they complete the School Certificate at the end of Year 10. However, as the people who participated in this consultation process have told us, there is a group of young people who are leaving even earlier. While many students complete the Higher School Certificate successfully, approximately one out of every three students beginning secondary school in Year 7 do not continue onto Year 12. (Source: NSW DET Strategic Planning and Regulation)

Some of the students who leave school before the end of Year 12 go on to study at TAFE NSW, some take up employment and some do both. A small proportion study with private vocational education and training (VET) providers or with Adult and Community Education. Those who go to TAFE can be divided into two groups: people who undertake Certificate and Diploma courses, including Apprentices and Trainees, across a wide range of trade and para-professional areas, and those who undertake general studies through Access courses. Access courses include the TAFE equivalent of the School Certificate (CGVE – the Certificate in General and Vocational Education), the TAFE HSC equivalent course, the Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC), as well as the Higher School Certificate itself.

Many students have great success in the Access programs and find these rewarding:

Like the program (TAFE Access) because they treat you like adults, give choices about what is learned and how we learn it. (Student interviewed by NSW Commission for Children and Young People)

However, a study of attrition rates for these two groups of 15 to 19 year old TAFE students shows that the outcomes are quite different. In the table below, the attrition rate refers to the percentage of enrolments where students withdraw from every module of their course during the year.

**Figure 3: TAFE NSW: Attrition and Module Completion Rates 2003**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All courses</th>
<th>CGVE</th>
<th>TPC</th>
<th>HSC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attrition rate 15 - 19</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
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Source: TAFE Statistics

It is apparent from these statistics that the attrition rates for students enrolled in Access courses is up to twice that for students enrolled in trade and other industry related courses. This is important because one of the traditional pathways for students who leave school early is to go to TAFE. In 2003, for instance, there were 135,000 enrolments of people aged 15 to 19 in TAFE NSW, of which almost 30,000 were in Access courses. There is a relatively small, but significant number of students (approximately 4,000-5,000 each year) who have left school early and yet have not been able to find success in the study of general education courses at TAFE.

For these people, together with those who leave school and take up neither work nor study, the consequences of not completing a formal education credential can be negative. This is supported by Wise et al, who state:
There is overwhelming evidence of the relationship between education, health and well-being among children, adolescents and adults. The important role of education as a mechanism for breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty is well-established. … Achieving high education is always associated with greater wellbeing. (Wise et al, 2003: 10)

Many of these people face long periods out of work (Penman, 2004: 42; OECD, 1999; OECD, 2003: 91), meaning they are more likely to be poor. This is a cumulative situation.

… the deprivation of the poor is pervasive … their infants are more likely to die. Their children are more likely to fail in school … Their children are more likely to drop out of school. They are more likely to become mentally ill. They are more likely to lose their jobs and to drop out of the labour force … In other words, poverty diminishes the quality of a person’s life in many obvious and in many not so obvious ways. (Vinson, 1999: 20)

In addition to the personal cost of this situation, there is an economic cost to New South Wales and therefore to Australia. Dusseldorp proposes a framework for costing early school leaving, given lower employment and lower productivity for early leavers:

To show the potential … gain from further education and training, suppose that the proportion of leavers who are unemployed or outside the workforce could fall from 34 per cent to 20 per cent. This would represent employment for an extra 11,000 young persons per annum who are now unemployed or not in the labour force. Allowing a modest average income of $17,500 per annum, a little more than the minimum wage, the extra schooling would generate about $190 million in extra incomes per annum. (Dusseldorp, 2002: 28 – 29)

Another means of costing early school leaving is found in the relationship between incarceration and early school leaving. It appears that people who were early school leavers may be statistically over-represented in detention facilities, though this relationship is a complex one. The same may be said of the relationship between disadvantage and youth crime:

Researchers do not yet fully understand the relationship between disadvantage and youth crime. The balance of evidence suggests that economic and social stress increase the risk of involvement in crime by increasing the motivation to offend. Weatherburn and Lind argue that the link between economic and social stress and crime is not always offender motivation but the increased incidence of poor parenting, neglect and abuse. (Wise et al, 2003: 13)

The cost of keeping a person in detention for one year, including legal fees, food, accommodation and guarding is $65,000. This is more than the annual salary of a school teacher1. In addition, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services reports that … the total cost of juvenile crime in Australia is stated to be $1.5 billion per year. (FACS, 2004)

A submission from the Youth Action and Policy Association expresses this equally strongly:

Failure to be in school long enough (early leaving) or often enough (truancy) to gain basic skills and knowledge has personal and social costs. Unemployment, poverty, homelessness and minor or gross criminal activity can often be linked to this basic failure. … Similarly the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research found that poor school performance to be a strong predictor of involvement in crime. (Youth Action and Policy Association)

Efforts are being made to address these issues. It should be acknowledged that a range of non-government and other organisations are working with disadvantaged young people using strategies designed to improve their life outcomes. The State Government has implemented the Better Futures Strategy, which … aims to increase the effectiveness of services for vulnerable young people aged between 9-18 years. (DoCS, 2002) However, we need to know why young people are leaving school early and what is to be done. The companion paper on this topic (Vickers, 2005) describes the reasons for early school leaving and outlines one successful strategy.

1 Based on the salary of a teacher on Step 7 (including on-costs); and it is only just less than the salary of a Step 7 teacher (including on-costs) who is also receiving the Home School Liaison Officer and Aboriginal Student Liaison Officer allowance
For the individual in particular, and for society in general, the consequences of a substantial number of students not participating successfully in education beyond the age of 15 are serious. Through the consultation process, we received a great many responses to the questions about 15 to 19 year old people, covering both the reasons for their leaving and providing us with strategies and priorities for change. Many of these were from students in schools and TAFE and an attempt has been made in this section to highlight their responses, while also ensuring the issues raised by other respondents are covered. Their responses provide important insights, a consideration of which will allow an understanding of how to address this key area of education provision.

Young People Aged 15 to 19 Years Old in the 21st Century

One group provided a description of issues facing people aged 15 to 19 that seemed to summarise many of the descriptions from other submissions:

… this age group is going through significant personal change and development. There is a need for the school and teachers to accommodate the diversity of the student needs both personal and learning. Peer pressure is enormous on individuals but often teachers don’t encourage and support students in making individual choice and decision.

When you are young you often lack confidence but as a teenager you can’t acknowledge that with peers and in the classroom. It is often too hard to get help from the teachers and you can be ridiculed. As a 15-19 year old you need to learn to push away fear and learn how to ask questions but you are not taught or encouraged to do this so you end up following the behaviour of others. There is a need to develop trust between teachers and students. Peer pressure and pressure from older students is usually significant and demotivating. (TAFE students and indigenous community members)

RELEVANCE OF CURRICULUM

Of all the factors which respondents said impacted on staying on at school, ‘relevance’ was the most commonly mentioned.

TAFE, parents and communities need to work together as the main reason for discontinuing studying in younger people, (other than cost), is relevance. An immediate and direct connection needs to be seen by students on how the subject learnt today will impact on their lives by increasing skills and/or knowledge. (TAFE student)

Respondents said they were looking for a curriculum which provided more choices for students, which was more flexible and provided real options, particularly for students who were at risk of leaving school early. People wanted to see curriculum with:

• more variety and choice
• learning which was purposeful and equipped students for their futures
• practical courses, including life skills
• greater vocational options.

A great many people commented on the need for increased vocational education and training (VET) options in secondary school. They wanted to see:

• ‘junior VET’: VET introduced earlier, for students in Years 9 and 10
• meaningful work experience and work placement
• VET given equal status in the community and by school teachers
• a greater proportion of VET being undertaken for the HSC and counting towards the UAI.

All 15 to 19 year old students regardless of the secondary school they attend should be able to access vocational education and training options. ... All schools should be encouraged to ensure that work experience programs are offered for students in years 10, 11 and 12. (TAFE staff meeting)

They also commented on the need for students and their parents to understand the purposes of the study they were undertaking. A number of people commented that students and their parents did not see how the current curriculum was equipping students for life after school, particularly in the case of students who were not bound for university.

The importance of meaningful work experience and work placement was generally shared, although industry was concerned about the maturity of younger students. A growing preference in industry for apprentices to have completed Year 12 arose during the consultations and subsequently strongly through the discussion about skills shortages. School students are becoming aware of this:

More jobs require us to have better qualifications through tertiary education and a higher level of school so we have to stay at school longer. (School student meeting)

Some respondents questioned the premise that all 15 to 19 year olds should be studying.

I know that economic indicators show the benefits of keeping kids at school/ other education/training as long as possible, but this is really not always appropriate. So long as they have a reasonable prospect of work, have received adequate career guidance, have adequate knowledge of their rights and responsibilities as workers, and know what future training options are available to them, leaving school for work at 15 may be a perfectly sensible option. (Parent)

Others felt that it was unrealistic to expect all young people to be in work or study. This was particularly the case with the expectation that everyone should undertake the Higher School Certificate. The Prime Minister, John Howard, stated his belief that the path from Year 10 completion to an apprenticeship is still a valid one.

‘Thirty years ago, we started getting this foolish bind that everybody had to go to university,’ he said. ‘Everybody doesn’t have to go to university, and a lot of people will be a lot better off if they don’t go to university, and they recognise that at age 15 or 16 and go down the technical stream.’ (quoted in Nick O’Malley, Sydney Morning Herald, 12/3/05)

Several respondents commented that vocational training should be offered to less gifted students, and to less academic students, although this view was not necessarily shared by industry. A number of respondents stated that young people should be allowed to make their own choices and bear the consequences of them. Other respondents felt that guest speakers from the community could speak to students at risk of leaving school from their personal experience, in
order to help them understand the consequences of leaving school early.

Some respondents felt that VET was not the solution to all the issues for this group of students.

While VET provision has been one response … this needs to be supplemented by evaluations and action in a range of areas including what schools expect of post-compulsory students, how students are ‘managed’, how they are taught and expected to learn as well as on the relevance and value to them of … the whole curriculum. (Curriculum K-12 Directorate)

**Higher School Certificate**

It was not the case that people wanted to change the current HSC in its entirety. The importance of having a strong, rigorous and academic HSC for students who intended to go on to university was made clear through a number of submissions. Instead, what people wanted to see was a broadening of the HSC to allow for a greater vocational component. People were divided on whether the vocational component should also be counted towards the UAI or whether this was unnecessary because the UAI is designed for university entrance.

To keep students in schools we need education that is relevant to their needs, is accessible and flexible. While academic courses must be maintained in senior schooling, better access to a wide range of VET courses is also required. (School principal)

A number of people commented that the current curriculum and HSC, including the UAI, were appropriate for those students who were going on to university study but not appropriate to the needs of those who were not and that young people shared this idea:

Many young people believe that the HSC is only worthwhile if they want to go to university. Young people want schools to be more flexible and provide for the diversity of interests and skills that they have … there is a need to develop more practical, job related subject choices for students whose career goals do not include further academic studies. (Youth Action and Policy Association)

Part of the call for a broader curriculum was for the HSC to include a much stronger vocational component.

There is a need to consider a wider range of credential options for students who choose to remain at school. Currently the … (HSC) is the only exit credential on the completion of Year 12. The HSC focuses on post-secondary university education. Limited university places and increasing numbers of students encouraged to stay at school to complete Year 12 highlight the need for change. To make schooling relevant for all students who stay on an alternative qualification such as a vocational education certificate may be required. (DET staff meeting)

One of the most common concerns raised was that the new HSC was too difficult for a number of students, particularly in Maths and English. Respondents said this led to students leaving school early.

Teachers should organise inspirational days so the students can have an idea of how the decision of staying in school will affect their future. (School student meeting)

Do students want an HSC? Do they need an HSC? What is the purpose of the HSC? (Joint schools TAFE meeting)

Why are we doing the university entrance exams for university? (Joint schools TAFE meeting)

The Universities Admission Index or HSC mark is not the end of their education. University is not the only alternative. (TAFE Student meeting)

Now there’s nothing inferior about being a tradesman, quite the reverse. I think we developed for a generation a cultural prejudice against tradesmen in this country and I think it was a terrible mistake. (Prime Minister, John Howard, Radio Interview with Leon Byner, SAA, 20 August 2004)
and they questioned the purpose of the HSC for some students. A number of people commented on the removal of Maths in Practice from the HSC syllabus, stating that this had disadvantaged a number of students for whom these subjects had been more appropriate.

People also commented on the pressure on students caused by the HSC and said that it should not hold so dominant a position over the whole senior curriculum.

Less pressure needs to be put on the HSC. Students need to know that it’s not everything, you can do other things after school if you don’t succeed. Teachers need to be less pressuring. (School student meeting)

People also said that there should be closer links between what students studied in Year 11 and for the HSC, to increase the relevance of Year 11. It should be noted, however, that some respondents felt that there had been too much change to the HSC and School Certificate.

Although some respondents endorsed the Victorian approach, with a separate and alternative credential of equal status (VCAL), the views expressed were not consistent. Some respondents felt that this would create two classes of school graduates. The concept of a broader HSC with greater access to vocational study was much more strongly supported by the respondents.

School Certificate

The comments made about the School Certificate echo the discussion of middle and secondary schooling, so they will not be dealt with in detail here. However, it should be noted that each year, about 8% of all 15 year olds in NSW leave the school system.

Opposing views were expressed, with some respondents suggesting the School Certificate be made more rigorous; others suggesting that it be abolished. Some respondents questioned the purpose of the School Certificate:

The concept of an exit credential such as the current School Certificate is inconsistent with our commitment to life long learning. It is more appropriate to consider any marker in the students’ progression as transition points: achievement is recognised and celebrated, and plans for the next phase of learning … are developed. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

Respondents believed the period between the completion of the School Certificate and the end of the school year was not being used effectively and wanted changes to the organisation of the School Certificate. Some said it should held much later in the year; others that students should be allowed to leave school after the exams; and others that students should be allowed to commence Year 11 work as soon as the School Certificate was finished.

Literacy, Numeracy and Generic Skills

One of the concerns raised by parents, industry, students and staff was that young people are leaving school without the basic skills they need to gain and keep a job, particularly in literacy and numeracy.
While one parent felt it was the role of industry to teach them these skills on the job, industry respondents felt that young people should have these skills before trying to gain employment.

*TAFE colleges at present provide the necessary literacy and numeracy courses to enable students to succeed in their chosen course. Similarly then, schools should encourage (be able to enforce) students to complete literacy courses as prerequisites for all stage 5 courses if they do not meet a minimum standard.* (School staff member)

Respondents also commented on the need for school students moving to TAFE to have a better understanding of the requirements of TAFE courses, particularly in terms of numeracy, as students were often surprised to find these courses more difficult than they had expected. TAFE students frequently commented that the courses at TAFE were more difficult than they had anticipated. Others, however, commented favourably on the support structures for students in TAFE (such as tutorial support).

A number of school students commented on the need to be taught study skills and suggested that this become a compulsory part of the school curriculum. TAFE staff also commented on the need to prepare school students for the adult learning environments they would encounter after school.

Some respondents commented that too narrow a vocational curriculum limited students’ options and said it was essential to engender a love of learning for its own sake. They said that students should leave school with transferable skills and knowledge:

*Education does not become more relevant by being job orientated, this is a very short term view, as most people will change jobs/ careers several times. They need the skills and knowledge that will allow them to change as the world environment changes.* (School staff member and parent)

This is very much in accordance with the current interest expressed by industry that students learn ‘generic’ skills such as working in teams, communication skills and problem solving skills:

*The need for students to have generic skills and employability skills in order to participate effectively and successfully in the world of work is now well-recognised.* (Board of Vocational Education and Training)

**TVET**

TVET is TAFE-delivered vocational education and training for school students. Under this initiative, school students undertake their vocational HSC studies at TAFE. TVET was seen by respondents as a highly successful initiative of the Department and an example of schools and TAFE working effectively together to meet the needs of students.

However, staff of schools and TAFE NSW commented on policy and structural issues which form barriers to expanding TVET. These included the funding formulae, which school staff felt ‘penalised’ them when students went to TAFE:

*Workplace literacy and workplace numeracy could be developed as VET courses in schools and would provide an alternative for students experiencing difficulties in English and maths.* (School staff member)

*Study: we need to be taught how to study, from early like year 9. It needs to be on (the) curriculum so teachers have to teach you to study properly, not just read through work. Maybe having a period set aside each cycle for revision.* (School student meeting)

*There must be no disadvantage to a school if it encourages students to attend TAFE TVET courses.* (NSW Federation of P&C’s Association of NSW)

*The opportunity to study TVET subjects in senior years is greatly appreciated. Students love TVET! It opens pathways to jobs and gives practical training.* (Joint TAFE and school student and staff meeting)
Report of the consultation on future directions for public education and training: One size doesn’t fit all

Need to change funding models for schools so that TVET is not competing with school funding. This provides major disincentive for schools to be involved in TVET at the moment. (TAFE staff meeting)

Respondents called for better collaboration between schools and TAFE:

More effective collaborative arrangements need to be established between the School and TAFE sectors, and between local TAFE Colleges and High Schools. (TAFE staff meeting)

Respondents also called for more flexibility, both in timetabling and other organisational issues. However, some respondents from schools told us of their unwillingness to disrupt school programs to allow school students to attend TAFE, because they were missing other parts of the curriculum which school teachers and principals felt were more essential. There was also the issue that TVET was not sufficiently valued:

TVET offerings need to be given more credibility at secondary school level and not treated as ‘second choice’ options. (Personal submission)

The time demands of work placement required by TVET were also seen by some respondents as an impediment to study. This should be compared with the responses to the TAFE sections of the consultation document, in which respondents emphasised the importance of meaningful work placement for students.

CAREER COUNSELLING

… career counselling is an enormously under-utilised tool. We should be asking students what sort of path they have laid out for themselves and then help them achieve this. (Community member)

A key issue for students aged 15 to 19 was the importance of high quality career counselling, also known as vocational guidance and career guidance in some circumstances:

In order to facilitate appropriate career path planning for 15 - 19 year olds, it is essential that more time, emphasis and resources be allocated to formal career path planning in schools. The curriculum should include mandatory careers lessons from year 7 and more opportunities for work experience. (School community group)

In general, respondents told us that they were not satisfied with the current standard of career guidance in schools:

… students emphasised their difficulties in obtaining good information about career paths, what jobs actually involve, the differences between University and TAFE education and the lack of coordination in higher education sector concerning objective career advice. (TAFE staff and students)

Respondents also expressed the concern that career guidance was focused only on university pathways and not on the full range of
options available to young people. This was said to be because trades and other vocational pathways were not always valued by career counsellors.

In TAFE, career counselling is available to enrolled students who seek such assistance. It is also available to prospective students. It appears that many respondents were unaware of this service. A number of people wanted to see TAFE and schools work much more closely together to ensure young people had all the information they needed.

There needs to be a closer relationship between TAFE & Schools, with the involvement of School Counsellors & Careers Advisors so that 15 to 19 year olds, and their parents are better informed about the opportunities to engage in vocational education and training. (TAFE staff meeting)

An issue of concern was that strategies proposed by students in one submission included activities that could be considered fundamental to the provision of career advice in any school. They wanted to see:

- Classes with career advisors.
- Tell them what's available.
- Tell what subjects you need for certain courses.
- Encourage students to do well so they have more options.
- Career lessons during school.
- Careers day.
- Better training for career advisors.
- Days out in the real world. (School student meeting)

A number of other respondents suggested that career counselling be made compulsory and wanted to see a range of improvements to the system. People were also keen to see career advice begin much earlier, some from Years 9 or 10 and others from Year 7.

Linked to career counselling were a number of comments advocating mentoring as a successful means of helping young people to stay on at school. The companion paper (Vickers, 2005) describes one successful model of mentoring.

**IMPORTANCE OF GOOD TEACHING**

Respondents to this paper commented on the importance of good teaching for students of this age:

- Learning needs to be interesting and varied. It needs to have a real purpose, evaluation of work and constructive criticism and feedback of work is vital. (School staff member)

Students said they wanted to be treated more as adults and as individuals. A number or respondents, particularly from Aboriginal communities, said that teachers need to have a better understanding of the external factors impacting on young people's lives. Teaching is covered in detail at the beginning of this chapter and in Chapter 5, concerning TAFE. This issue of curriculum guarantee, raised by a number of respondents, is discussed in Chapter 3.
I think discipline is good, ‘cause if I didn’t get put on a contract then I would be @%*ed for the rest of my life because I should have no education – the contract kept me in school and doing what I had to do. (Young person interviewed by NSW Commission for Children and Young People)

Help students to learn responsibility for their own learning through coaching to achieve outcomes and course complete. (TAFE and school students meeting)

Students are often encouraged/ sent to TAFE when they become problems at the high schools, need to look at possible ways of addressing problems in lieu of passing on. (TAFE staff meeting)

Teachers don’t care about kids or parents so child behaves accordingly. (Aboriginal community meeting)

… link youth allowance to school attendance & achieving outcomes. (School community group)

… money issues: some students can’t afford to live and remain at school; need better Austudy and accommodation and food. (TAFE student meeting)

**BEHAVIOUR ISSUES AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AT RISK**

A number of respondents commented on student behaviour. Some commented that the perception of poor behaviour was in part due to a lack of understanding of students’ personal circumstances. Others commented that poor behaviour occurred because teachers did not value students and did not treat them with respect or as adults. Others felt that parents needed to play a more active role in setting and maintaining behaviour standards for their children. A number of respondents expressed the view that school students with behaviour problems were being encouraged by some school teachers to leave school; and by some to enrol in TAFE, although this was not always the best option:

> Difficult students should not be automatically referred to TAFE. There should not be an assumption that TAFE vocational education and training or an adult environment will solve their problems. The disengagement of students is often more than just a product of the education environment. (Industry group)

TAFE teachers, supported by the comments of some school teachers, also commented that TAFE is perceived by some people as the place to send students who are not behaving appropriately at school. Although staff from one Institute said they had implemented professional development for teachers specifically to support teachers in dealing with students with behaviour problems, TAFE staff and industry expressed the concern that TAFE does not have appropriate support services to manage this issue:

> Behaviourally challenging students encouraged by schools to leave school and attend TAFE … (has) no support services eg behavioural teams to deal with their behaviour and lack of learning skills. (TAFE staff and parents meeting)

Alternative provision is also being made for such students:

> The ALESCO Learning Centre in Newcastle has become an alternative pathway for many students from low socio-economic backgrounds who have been excluded from the mainstream school system, and also a referral point for schools in the Hunter Region who are seeking an alternative form of education for their students at risk. (Board of Adult and Community Education)

Students’ learning to take responsibility for their own actions was also a theme expressed by a number of people. It was felt that if too ‘soft’ an approach was taken, students would not be prepared for the harsh realities of the modern world. Other respondents wanted students to have more input into their own learning:

> Encouraging students to take increasing responsibility for what they learn through self-selection and development of one or more personally meaningful focus learning areas from the curriculum, for which they will be accountable. Significant student input into learning criteria, success indicators and choice of assessment methods to be encouraged. (Vocational Education in Schools Directorate)

Several respondents wanted to see restrictions placed on young people’s access to government benefits, with a link between
attendance and receipt of benefits. Respondents were also concerned about young people gaining access to Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) funding instead of completing their education. Some respondents stated that there were some students who enrolled solely for the purpose of getting benefits and then ceased to attend or were uninterested, with a negative impact on those who wanted to learn. Some respondents also suggested that Centrelink take a more active role in pursuing this. Two school students, however, commented on the financial burden placed on families of students staying on in study.

As discussed in Vickers’ academic paper, mentoring is seen as a highly successful strategy for assisting students at risk of disengaging from study, including students with behaviour problems. Respondents wanted to see:

Student support services in communities where there are high levels of poverty, which should include homework centres, mentoring, access to information and communication technology, and health and welfare services. (Industry member)

A number of respondents wanted to see those mentoring programs which were already in place extended to a wider range of students and educational settings:

We notice at our program that some early leavers drop out of school because they think no one is interested in them. We think a wide spread mentoring program in schools linking young people with the community is needed. (Youthstart Coordinators)

COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND TAFE

Students, parents, industry and the community generally felt that they wanted to see strong and effective links between schools and TAFE. They also wanted to see the two organisations operating more as one organisation, with clear connections visible to the public.

There needs to be some common knowledge and mutual respect developed between both systems because at the moment there is no common ground from what we see. They are two separate organisations without any commonality or continuity in curriculum. (School student meeting)

The responses made it clear that there were areas where this was happening well and other areas where it was not:

At the moment, schools and TAFEs are not able to work together as their timetables cannot be reconciled. Also, schools are penalised in terms of staffing for each student who elects to travel to a TAFE to study. This is a disincentive to schools advising students to take up TAFE courses. (School P&C)

It should be noted, however, that a number of people commented on the different cultures of the school and TAFE, and some commented that TAFE seemed better able to cope with students at risk of discontinuing education and training than schools, although this was not a universally held view:
It is significant that TAFE is often more successful with many students who ... seek to leave school early. While the establishment of senior colleges and vocational pathways diversifies the way in which schools cater for these students it is essential that TAFE, alongside and in partnership with secondary schools, have a capacity to provide for these students. (TAFE staff member)

While the NSW Teachers Federation and a number of other respondents were keen to see comprehensive schools maintained, other respondents stated that senior colleges, run as joint facilities by schools and TAFE (and, some suggested, other providers), or as adjacent facilities were an excellent model which should be extended:

Senior Colleges and TAFE should be integrated to enable students to access the widest possible learning options. (State office staff member)

One of the key issues here was ensuring that school students had a good understanding of what TAFE had to offer. They suggested:

- open days and visits to schools by representatives of TAFE and local industry and former students
- information packages available to students
- career guidance, as mentioned above, which canvassed the full range of options open to students after school and explained the career paths available
- more TVET courses and TAFE ‘taster’ courses
- more Summer Schools, though it was not made clear whether respondents were referring to the Premier, Bob Carr’s initiative or other models.

The importance of work placement in VET courses was emphasised. Respondents stated that it was essential for school students to have an opportunity to experience the world of work, especially where they had an interest in working in a particular industry. School-based traineeships were mentioned as a good strategy, though more commonly it was simply the opportunity to participate in meaningful work placement as part of their VET courses which was seen to be the answer.

As with TVET, funding policy was also raised as an issue by respondents:

... the funding of TAFE needs to be revised ... [it] needs to be based on student demand/enrolments in respect of enrolments up to the age of 18 years. This will ensure that TAFE as a successful provider will be able to expand its provision beyond the constraints of existing budgets. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

In simple terms, schools are funded on the basis of demand: the more students in a school the greater the resources, including the number of teachers. Where a program like TVET occurs, with the students enrolled in a school but studying part-time at TAFE, the funding ‘travels’ with the student.
However, a student aged 15 to 19 who leaves school to enrol in TAFE is like any other TAFE student. TAFE has a funding allocation within which it must deliver its services. It does not get additional funding for 15 to 19 year old students who leave school to undertake the school certificate equivalent course (the CGVE) or the HSC. This means that TAFE must balance the needs of students aged 15 to 19 with the needs of all the other students wanting to enrol.

Finally, respondents wanted to see flexibility in movement between schools to meet student needs:

… my son was 4 years at one high school, and tested out a move to a senior secondary college … but preferred to return to his usual school – however he was refused return – schools that specialise will not be interested in students moving easily between schools, TAFE and universities unless it benefits the school (rather than the student). (Parent and TAFE staff member)

MEETING THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF STUDENTS

Young Aboriginal People

A number of submissions were received from Aboriginal people, particularly through various consultative forums. It was clear that the issue of young people disengaging from study and work was of particular concern for Aboriginal communities. These submissions listed a series of strategies for assisting students aged 15 to 19 who were Aboriginal, although many of these strategies have equal relevance for all students in this age group. They included:

- better transition for students between primary and high school including K – 12 schools
- more Aboriginal staff, including principals
- employment flexibility in schools that allows more Aboriginal staff to be employed
- more culturally inclusive teaching and learning strategies
- the importance of involving Aboriginal communities in school decision-making, eg Yarn-up days
- a focus on practical skills
- smaller class sizes and individual attention
- more flexible time tabling and attendance patterns.

Aboriginal people also wanted to see a greater vocational component in secondary school, with access to TVET for every Aboriginal student, as well as better collaboration between schools and TAFE:

Consistency between TAFE and Schools in how to retain Aboriginal students. TAFE and Schools should work together to retain Aboriginal students. (Aboriginal community Forum)

They also wanted strategies designed to address disengagement to start earlier:

… Aboriginal kids are leaving at Yr 7, 8 and 9 before they get to 15 years. Often these children are doing very well at primary
school and drop out in first or second year of high school. Why – changes from 1 main teacher to up to 6 or 7 teachers in first year of high school. Lack of transition programs from Yr 6 to Yr 7, leaving home community as High school is often outside of local community. (Regional AECG)

Respondents also suggested a range of strategies to provide Aboriginal staff members, including mentors, to assist Aboriginal students:

A suggestion is to have an Aboriginal Cultural Co-ordinator for Schools who assist staff and develop ongoing programs to assist teachers in understanding issues about indigenous communities and people; teach literacy and language including the local indigenous language; mentor AEA's and kids; teaching Aboriginal Studies. (Indigenous community meeting)

Respondents wanted to see programs designed to improve school teachers' understanding of the specific needs of Aboriginal people. Racism was also raised as an issue needing to be addressed.

The recent Aboriginal Education Review (NSW AECG and NSW DET, 2004) has made a number of recommendations concerning issues for Aboriginal people in education and training. The Government is currently considering its response to these recommendations.

**Young People from Language Backgrounds other than English**

A number of submissions were received about the issues for students of language backgrounds other than English. These submissions canvassed a range of issues across secondary schools and are discussed in that section of the report. In essence they were concerned about extending the provision of ESL; the demand on Intensive English Centres; and the issues for recent immigrant arrivals with very low levels of previous education.

**Young People who are Gifted and Talented**

One submission raised the issue of the needs of gifted and talented students who are aged 15 to 19 and the success of selective schools as a strategy:

… when the academic needs of academically gifted students are not catered for such students are likely to drop out. They become bored, demoralised and even depressed … In selective high schools, where … [their] needs … are more likely to be met, there is a very high retention rate. The retention rate of academically gifted students in selective high schools, then, becomes an extremely powerful indicator of the success of these schools. (OC & Selective High School Placement Unit)

**Young People with Disabilities**

Respondents stated that more effective links between schools and TAFE would lead to better outcomes for students with disabilities:
Increased organisational flexibility will be essential in order for TAFE and schools to better meet the diverse needs of students, particularly for those experiencing barriers to education. (TAFE TA Outreach Special Interest Group)

However, one TAFE staff member expressed concern that students with disabilities not be ‘pushed’ from schools to TAFE if that was not the best approach to meet their needs.

Respondents also wanted to see a curriculum that did not provide barriers for students with disabilities by being too rigorous, and wanted DET to:

- Fund more resources for Life Skills programs for the SC and HSC for students with significant disabilities and learning difficulties. (School principal)

One submission called for greater flexibility to accommodate the needs of young carers:

- Young carers and siblings of children with disability are more likely to leave the school system early due to the difficulties they face juggling their responsibilities at home with the demands placed on them from the school. A more flexible approach is required. (Carer Support)

Respondents called for professional development for teachers, some suggesting the use of experts as trainers. Some also wanted to see Special Education as a mandatory component of all pre-service education. These issues are taken up in Chapter 3.

**Issues Specific to Students in Remote Rural NSW**

As described in the section on secondary schooling, school completions for 15 to 19 year olds in remote rural New South Wales are markedly lower than for metropolitan school students. A key issue raised by respondents for the 15 to 19 age group in remote NSW was access to the same experiences that young people in the city have:

- Students in remote areas need access to opportunities given to city students eg live performances, lecturers etc. with assistance for travel and accommodation due to isolation. Country students particularly need to be exposed to many and varied experiences to broaden their horizons. (School staff member)

Respondents also wanted young people to have access to quality teaching:

- The greatest need of students in remote areas is to have suitably qualified teachers… These schools are frequently characterised by inadequately prepared staff, lack of specialist teachers, lack of experienced local DET support and school leaders with sufficient experience. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

Respondents wanted to see broader curriculum options and suggested that technologies might be used to provide this, as well as to combine small groups of students to make viable classes, so increasing the subject choices for students in remote locations.

Expand teacher training: young people are particularly affected by teachers’ understanding and awareness of students’ barriers to learning; and provide more staff learning in Aboriginal and disabilities awareness. (TAFE staff meeting)

All schools need to be aware of the range of services available for students with a disability, with up-to-date knowledge of funding timeframes. (The Spastic Centre)

… more online learning; emailing with teachers/other students. (School and TAFE student meeting)

Rural inequity needs to be addressed, kids have to leave town to access education. (Regional staff meeting)

Innovative strategies for students in remote areas should be developed and system support provided. (Curriculum K-12 Directorate)
without requiring them to travel. The distance travelled to high school was raised as an issue particularly for younger secondary students.

Some respondents questioned the need for the HSC in rural communities:

\textit{In country areas the benefits of staying for the HSC drop off sharply. Farms and properties need to be run, and university is a far away thing. In remote communities having people staying to the end of their HSC may be counterproductive, with not enough of that generation staying local to preserve the town.} (School student)

Transport and accommodation were seen as key issues for students in remote locations and a number of people suggested that TAFE offer block programs for school students to allow them to access vocational courses. TAFE currently provides block programs for its students, particularly apprentices, known as ‘block release’. These comments about school students provide an interesting contrast to the comments about TAFE students, with some people saying the current block release programs are not always convenient for employers.

**APPRENTICESHIPS AND TRAINEESHIPS**

**Apprenticeships**

As mentioned above, apprentices were described as a critical means of addressing the current skills shortages. Throughout the consultation, many respondents commented on the importance of apprenticeships and the need to review and improve the apprenticeship system. These comments are dealt with in detail in the TAFE section of this report, Chapter 5. States have been dealing with this issue for some time, with NSW introducing TradeStart@TAFENSW to make apprenticeships more attractive to employers and employees and, in Victoria, the Education Minister Lynne Kosky describing the positive impact of VCAL (Maslen, 2005).

In summary, people told us that the system should be more flexible, with different entry points depending on previous study and experience. They also wanted to see incentives for both employers and apprentices to make the scheme more attractive.

Recent comments on skills shortages indicate that some people are questioning whether all students should complete the HSC. Others, for example Heather Ridout of the Australian Industry Group, have indicated that industry is now looking for people with higher skills levels and greater maturity and the system should assist in this:

\textit{If we’re going to give this bargain to kids to stay around in school to year 12, we have to offer them better options … and we haven’t done that.} (H. Ridout, interviewed on The 7.30 Report, 9/3/05)

One respondent commented on the difficulty experienced by young apprentices:

\textit{… those who would like to apply for apprenticeships at the end of Year 10 … do not have enough knowledge of how to survive
in the ‘real’ world and often fail. This lowers their self-esteem, so many end up on the dole. (Personal submission)

The same respondent wanted to see a better understanding of older students returning to school:

Some others return to school, and allowances need to be made for these over 18 yrs. (They can die for their country in a war, but not leave school without a note from a parent!) (Personal submission)

**Traineeships**

A number of respondents also commented on traineeships. Generally, these were seen to be a useful approach for engaging young people and providing for a successful transition from school to work, whether they were part-time school-based traineeships, traineeships conducted through TAFE or through other providers.

Respondents wanted to see the number of traineeships extended and wanted to see them better organised. Respondents also called for more flexible approaches to make it easier for school students to become trainees and to complete their traineeships:

Change structure of day so year 11/12 has 1/2 day blocks allowing more students to participate in TAFE and in school traineeships. The spread out over the week timetable currently in practice at most schools inhibits this flexibility. (School staff member)

Respondents suggested traineeships be available for younger students:

Vocational learning, including accredited vocational courses should be available for Year 9 and 10 students. Where appropriate, students should be supported to commence a part-time traineeship or apprenticeship in Year 10. (State Office staff member)

As with apprenticeships, wages were seen to be a barrier. Some respondents expressed concerns about traineeships where they did not include real training. Others were concerned about the demands on employers, teachers and students:

There are demands placed upon students and teachers in the organisation of VET Framework courses. These courses are 240 hours in duration over two years PLUS an additional 70 hours in Work Placement, making them in practice a 310 hour course. Students are required to miss two weeks of school to undertake these Work Placements which is often difficult. It has been suggested that Work Placement can be incorporated into the 240 hours of the course but little practical direction has been forthcoming. Teachers of VET Framework courses have far too much additional paperwork to complete which needs to be eliminated. (School staff member)

The same respondent also advocated that traineeships be included as part of the HSC:
In School Traineeships have been in operation for a number of years and suit some students. However, students do not receive credit on the HSC for the time spent in the workplace. Therefore, In School Traineeships should have a total of 4 units counted towards the HSC (ie 2 units from theory and 2 units from the workplace). (School staff member)

**COMMUNICATION**

Another issue mentioned was the need for both schools and TAFE to communicate with parents and carers (and in the case of TAFE, employers) about students’ progress. People wanted to know early if students were struggling or behaving inappropriately and did not want to wait until exam results or parent-and-teacher nights to find out that their children were experiencing difficulties.

*Parents could be kept updated with their child’s progress so that if their grades are falling, then the parents can assist with getting them back on track to working harder.* (School student)

As one student said, *How do my parents know I’m learning?* (School community meeting)

**FLEXIBILITY**

Many respondents wanted to see more flexible approaches in schools across a range of issues: this could best be summarised by the idea that ‘one size does not fit all’. School students commonly work, some for long hours, and school organisation needs to accommodate this:

*Better utilisation of school resources outside 9-3:30 to promote [flexibly] offered courses. Timetabling in schools that is designed to assist students into multiple pathways. Greater accountability for time tabling – schools who are actively discouraging multiple pathways and only focused on self interest. Funding/rostering of TAFE/School staff to work with each others time tabling/flexible.* (School staff meeting)

Respondents called for increased flexibility in timetabling and hours of operation; curriculum, to allow schools to meet the local and individual needs of students and their communities; and funding arrangements across schools and TAFE.

*I believe to keep more students in school and training; the curriculum needs to be more flexible, more versatile. There needs to be avenues for school leavers to take that would allow them, or inspire them to remain in school or perhaps pursue a TAFE course etc. At the moment, there are numerous possibilities for students; however people commonly find problems with fitting their desired subject into an available line.* (School student)

Some called for mandatory hours of curriculum to be abolished (addressed in the Secondary School section of this report). They wanted to see part-time study made available to school students and TAFE providing study opportunities for school students during school holidays.
In addition to senior colleges, mentioned above, respondents suggested that we accommodate:

- single sex schools
- extended hours eg for libraries and ICT facilities
- student access to university while completing the HSC
- student access to TAFE for a younger age (though not all agreed)
- multiple pathways, allowing students to complete a package of units which meets their needs, across school, TAFE, university and other providers.

Respondents also mentioned the need for curriculum flexibility to allow people to address local skill shortages and job growth opportunities in new areas.

Some respondents wanted to see more flexibility in movement and concurrent enrolments across the sectors:

> Allow students to move between school, work, TAFE or university to hold their interest and allow them to achieve their goals. (Isolated Children’s Parents Association)

Finally, there were some respondents who said that it was of great importance that we teach young people that learning is lifelong and, if they make a choice they later regret, this can be remedied:

> There should be a greater awareness that we are never too old to learn; a premature choice to leave school early should not mean lost/limited future opportunities but a need to be more imaginative when exploring different pathways if choices are being considered later. (School P&C meeting)

**IN SUMMARY**

The strong response to this part of the consultation leaves no doubt about the importance of this issue. The consultation has provided an opportunity through which … *the independent student voice (can) be clearly heard by all parents, teachers and administrators* (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW). Students and other respondents have told us they want a more relevant curriculum, with greater vocational content. They want more flexibility across all services with greater individualisation. They want to be treated with respect.

Respondents want schools and TAFE to work together to improve student outcomes and engagement in work and study. They are seeking better career counselling which covers the full range of opportunities beyond school and helps them make effective transitions. Finally, they are looking to the DET to work with other agencies to create initiatives which will assist all young people to achieve their goals and fulfil their potential.
References


