



**Submission to  
Victorian Government**

**Regarding  
Review into Vocational and Applied Learning  
Pathways in Senior Secondary Schooling**

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## Vocational and Applied Learning Pathways in Senior Secondary Schooling

### Pre-script:

This submission is provided at a time when supermarkets and the supply chain are struggling to meet the needs of a community impacted by a public health crisis and SDA members are experiencing the most extreme of workplace risks and their skills are not being recognised with essential services payments. Further, discretionary retail spending is falling off a cliff, and tens of thousands of jobs have been lost with thousands of shops closing their doors. The situation is changing rapidly, but education and training will need to be part of the recovery process for many SDA members. This submission was drafted prior to the peak of the public health crisis, and as it is part of a series of reform discussions underway, it was felt it is still appropriate to provide it to the reviewer. It is asked that it be read in this context.

### Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association and school VET pathways

1. The Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association is one of Australia's largest trade unions with over 210,000 members<sup>1</sup> working in retail, fast food, warehousing, hairdressing, pharmacy, online retailing and modelling. The majority of SDA members are low paid workers, with award rates of just over \$800 per week<sup>2</sup>, and they are predominately women (60%) and young people (40%)<sup>3</sup>. The SDA has a long history of advocating on behalf of members. The SDA does this through enterprise bargaining; ensuring Awards and the National Employment Standards (NES) provide a relevant safety net; and through numerous submissions made to parliamentary and government inquiries and other important reviews that relate to their experiences.
2. A key advocacy role for the SDA is protecting and supporting a strong and vibrant industry providing jobs with fair and just remuneration and contributing to the economy including through skilled workers. Registered enterprise agreements and awards outline the minimum terms and conditions of employment, including the appropriate classification of workers according to the skills, qualification and experience required for the role. The system of employment in Australia is therefore reliant on reliable and high-quality education and training prior to and during people's working lives, and this includes education in Vocational Education and Training (VET) settings.
3. VET includes vocational and applied learning pathways in senior secondary schooling including options like the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), Board Endorsed Courses in New South Wales, or VET courses, school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, or trade colleges in other parts of Australia. These programs are broadly intended to provide students in Years 11 and

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<sup>1</sup> Internal SDA data.

<sup>2</sup> General Retail Industry Award 2010 - <http://awardviewer.fwo.gov.au/award/show/MA000004>

<sup>3</sup> Internal SDA data.

12 practical work-related experiences alongside literacy and numeracy skills. Where suitability applied, these courses enable students to undertake apprenticeships, traineeships, further education and employment, and to receive nationally recognised qualifications, while also gaining their senior school certificate.

4. However, in Victoria, there are opportunities for improvement to the system, and the Victorian Review into Vocational and Applied Learning Pathways in Senior Secondary Schooling should set a new direction that the rest of Australia emulates. This submission to the Victorian Review into Vocational and Applied Learning Pathways in Senior Secondary Schooling led by Mr John Firth. SDA recognises that decisions in Victoria can influence policy nationally, especially in skills and training policy which is undergoing major reform. It is in that context, SDA National contributes to this discussion and looks forward to participating in deliberations about 'Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy', led by The Hon Jenny Macklin.

### Objectives of school VET pathways

5. Australia must reform the vocational education and training system to enable all students and workers to access on an as needed basis the skills development and qualifications which will enable them to obtain and retain employment. VET qualifications should:
  - 5.1. have a vocational focus and result in employment,
  - 5.2. include skills that are transferable between employers of an occupation,
  - 5.3. be recognised by employers and between sectors of education – studies at Universities, TAFEs, private training colleges and schools should be considered equally, and
  - 5.4. where there is workplace engagement, include pay at the minimum wage or above (whether or not that includes other payments from government and/or employers and including costs associated with study).
6. School VET pathways should include:
  - 6.1. apprenticeships and traineeships consistent with a national qualifications' framework (currently the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)), which include fit-for-purpose assessment and licensing, and are developed through supported tripartite arrangements which include representatives of government, employers, employees and students,
  - 6.2. qualifications that promote a combination of work and structured on-the-job training and an appropriate balance of on and off-the-job training, and
  - 6.3. the opportunity for flexible formation into an occupation, be that an occupation, trade, or profession in nature and whatever the system through which the education occurs.
7. Some barriers to this objective include:

7.1. The funding and regulation of VET providers flow on costs to students.

- There is a need for publicly funded industry-led institutions, TAFEs. TAFE should be the pillar of the VET system and should be supplemented with specialist training institutions to ensure that career development is industry-led and integrated with work. It is also important that research and development within the education system is fostered so that the retail industry is cutting edge and a sustainable place to work through transitions to new technologies and ways of working resulting in a vibrant local economy well into the future.
- There is a need for a test of reasonable costs for participation by a student. Given the objective of VCAL is workforce participation, a major barrier is costs to the student. For example, in another jurisdiction, an SDA member's training provider charged excessively for 'resources' as opposed to 'text books', 'tools of the trade' and 'tuition' which are treated differently. This kind of practice puts employees at risk of being paid less than the minimum wage. Further, SDA members in some states and territories are funded at a higher rate than others, resulting in inequitable pricing across the country.

7.2. The lack of funding for multiple certificate qualifications at the same level of the AQF.

- There is a need for greater flexibility while students, who are often between 15 and 17, come to a view about their skills and suitability for certain occupations. Some students, especially early in their senior school studies, are encouraged to undertake a certificate or units of study that they later decide is not the right occupation for them. For example, a student doing a certificate II during school may later be unable to complete another certificate II that is a pre-pathway to a trade (certificate III). While students who enjoy school might choose to go to university and, potentially, do a generalist degree before specialising at masters level, students who prefer practical (or kinaesthetic) learning may require testing their practical skills in an occupation at the same level of the AQF more than once.

## Responses to a selection of the questions put

**8. What should the primary objectives of VCAL, VET delivered to school students and SBATs be?**

The primary objectives of VCAL, VET delivered to school students and SBATs should be employment. And doing so, the qualifications should be transferable between employers and students should be compensated equitably for engagement in the employed workforce.

**9. What are the relative benefits and risks of maintaining the dual-certificate framework (i.e. VCAL and VCE) or moving to a single-certificate framework (with both academic and vocational pathways)?**

A key benefit of a single-certificate framework is that it sets up students for TAFE and University and is consistent with a future reform that would see the transferability of credit between the two systems of tertiary and further education.

**10. What is a successful outcome for VCAL students, VET delivered to school students and SBAT students?**

A successful outcome for students of VET subjects in schools, be that through VCAL, VET in Schools or Schools Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships is the completion of, or substantial progress towards, an apprenticeship, traineeship, or further education and employment qualification that is nationally recognised and which will support students to get paid employment.