

## SCHOOL-BASED APPRENTICESHIPS AND TRAINEESHIPS Review of policies and procedures

### DISCUSSION PAPER

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Queensland Department of Employment and Training

RESPONSE from VETnetwork Australia and the Association of Post Compulsory Educators Qld (APCEQ)

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VETnetwork Australia is the peak professional association supporting practitioners working with VET in Schools. APCEQ works in partnership with VETnetwork Australia. Responses have been prepared by the Executive of both Associations and circulated to approximately 200 Queensland members for comment.

It is timely to revisit the policies and procedures in relation to school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SATs) in the light of current state and federal initiatives:

- Release of the skills reform white paper, *Queensland Skills Plan*
- Implementation of Education and Training Reform for the Future (ETRF)
- Introduction of the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE)
- Establishment of Australian Technical Colleges (ATC)
- New guidelines in relation to Local Community Partnerships (LCPs), Youth Pathways and New Apprenticeship Centres (NACs)
- Establishment of Regional Industry Career Advisors (RICAs)
- New Workplace Relations Legislation.

All of the above impact on education and training and seek to address skill shortages and assist students in their decisions in relation to employment and further education and training.

Is there a shared understanding and acceptance among stakeholders of the **primary purpose and objectives** of the SATs (School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships) program? What is the perception among stakeholders that the objectives of the SATs program are being met?

### *Shared understanding and acceptance among stakeholders of SAT objectives*

**Students and parents** view SATs as an opportunity to gain relevant work experiences and skills, employment pathways and opportunities and credible qualifications which can articulate to further employment, training or tertiary studies. SATs provide credit points towards the QCE and at Certificates II and III level provide a ranking for tertiary entrance.

**Schools** view the Senior Phase of Learning as an opportunity for students to develop vocational learnings and the knowledge and skills to prepare them for lifelong learning and employment. Developing a young person's lifelong learning and employability skills will improve their opportunities for employment and life generally rather than a specific career.

**Industry and government** may view the main objective of SATs as addressing skill shortages. To put training in place which satisfies the current needs of industries is short-sighted if students do not have the foundation knowledge and skills needed to learn

throughout their lives and to adapt to new technologies and new employment priorities in the future.

Since 1997, **Queensland schools have demonstrated an enthusiasm for and a commitment to SATs.** In the last couple of years schools have embraced the opportunity to offer AQF certificate courses as credible Registered Training Organisations. It is VET in schools which encourages students to undertake SATs. **Schools, however, lack the capacity to respond to skill shortages and employment opportunities in their regions and thus students tend to seek SATs in vocational areas of which they have experience and knowledge.**

**Industries with skill shortages would benefit by supporting schools in their quest to offer relevant, industry standard education and training.** The new RICAs could work with LCPs to inform schools of skills shortages and encourage students to participate in these areas, if schools are resourced to progress expectations. Currently schools are restricted in the VET qualifications they can offer because of the demands made by Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs) that are quick to criticise the level of training, the lack of resources, and the qualifications of teachers in schools trying to deliver industry qualifications. It would be beneficial if ITABs encouraged large industries to provide credible workplace training for students, fostered supportive partnerships with schools, assisted schools in obtaining the human and physical resources they need, provided industry placement to teachers and adopted schools to form co-operative learning models.

In the traditional trades, schools choose to restrict the offerings to Engineering, Furnishing, Construction and Hospitality (Kitchen Operations) at a level one qualification due to the complex issues of engaging other RTOs. Each level one qualification gains two credit points on the QCE. Information Technology, Business and Arts tend to be at a Certificate II level and gain extra credit points. **Schools have been told by industry that higher level qualifications are not possible in traditional trades due to Industrial Relations issues - is this still the case? Is it a wage progression issue?**

If industries worked with education to ensure that schools were able to offer higher trade qualifications and assisted certain schools to develop "excellence" programs in the trade areas, such a combined effort would do more to address skill shortages than changes to SATs policies and procedures. Industries want students who are well-trained but give little credit to the training that takes place in schools.

**Students should be able to gain recognition for the units of competency they study at school which are relevant to their SAT.** RTOs which undertake the training for SATs should be able to form partnerships for delivery and assessment of some aspects of the training plan and negotiate some of the training dollars with the schools for their contribution.

In order to raise the status of certain industries in the eyes of students, students need to know that the training they receive at school is valuable and valued by the education and training sector and employers. During the Senior Phase of Learning many young people will change their minds about their future direction and no decision they make while at school should limit their opportunities for the future. Therefore, VET qualifications need to be recognised on the QCE, by tertiary institutions not just Overall Positions (OPs) and by industry.

**With the increased discussion on skills shortages, it is likely more effort will need to be placed on completion, mentoring, and lobbying for more flexibility in apprenticeship timelines so that young people are encouraged to undertake apprenticeships with the assurance they will be paid in accordance with their skill level.** This will assist with the skills shortages in Australia. As schools are very aware of the standards in the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), and the need to protect trade qualifications, this

**changing attitude to more flexibility should not result in a lowering of standards in the trades, but rather, align with the competency based systems familiar to students, trainers and teachers.**

Teachers in schools perceive that they are contributing to SAT programs in an effective way. Students are supported, advised, mentored and provided with quality career advice. There is often a partnership between teachers in schools and the outside RTO so that consistency and reinforcement can occur as knowledge and skills develop. This means the objectives of SAT programs are being met. The number of students in Queensland who have taken up a SAT is strong evidence of the acceptance of the model, and that outcomes are being met.

Does the current policy allow the flexibility for participants to negotiate an appropriate mix of work, training and schooling? Is the **48 days of paid work as a minimum** sufficient to enable assessment of workplace competency? Are stakeholders (NACs, schools, DET, SRTOs) promoting SATs as “up to one day a week” as the only means of participating in a SAT apprenticeship and therefore is there a need to further promote the flexibility of SAT arrangements with major stakeholders?

### *Minimum 48 days of paid work per year*

**The minimum of 48 days is still realistic. It allows for flexibility** and enables extra days to be determined according to the capacity of the industry, group training company or student’s school commitments. Such flexibility should be promoted to all stakeholders but when decisions are made about the days in the workplace all parties should be in agreement.

Many schools adopt a case management approach to SAT programs so that the ETES form and training contract, and subsequent implementation, provide young people with **an effective balance of school and work life, without putting at risk the quality of trade training.**

The attraction of SAT programs has been the mix of school and work. Discussions suggest very few schools would promote a SAT to a student without clearly indicating and valuing the ‘on the job’ commitment. **In some cases it is difficult to measure the students ‘on the job’ hours** as the formal timetable/ETES form may indicate one day per week (48 days per year), but the student may complete much more than this when including work negotiated directly by the student, or work completed at school where the school is a large employer providing real experiences.

The **1/3 rule** is archaic given the increasing variation in timetable organisation and release within schools. It is also a nonsense given the variation in different trades and the ability of some SATs to demonstrate quality skills and knowledge at different times. **The inconsistent application of competency based learning in the off the job and on the job components is confusing and does not build confidence in the apprenticeship system.**

SAT programs are probably still promoted as “one day per week” by stakeholders (NACs, schools, DET, SRTOs, LCPs). This is largely due to school timetables. However another issue relates to the need for schools to gain federal and state recurrent funding to finance school operations. Students need to be full time students for this funding to be gained. Schools do not obtain any ‘user choice’ funding and do not offer training to SATs so their budgets would be severely affected if recurrent funding could not be obtained. **Many schools would prefer to release SATs for more time with employers if this budgetary issue could be resolved, and if parents and students accepted a more limited but focused curriculum for SATs** – and hence have less disruption to studies when leaving to work with employers. The Australian Technical College North Brisbane, due to open January 2007, should provide evidence of community, parental, and employer levels of satisfaction when working with a

school environment focused mainly on trades. In this model, release time for work will be largely governed by employer need, but balanced with opportunities for students to complete a general education program relevant to their trade

Is there a need to provide policy direction with regard to a minimum impact on the **school-timetable** or will any attempt to apply a quantum inhibit participation?

### *Impact on the school timetable*

It is difficult to gauge whether stakeholders, especially those in schools, would prefer to have **policy direction** impact on school timetables. Some stakeholders suggest a policy statement that says SATs should complete on the job training regularly, as opposed to on their holidays, is more educationally sound and leads to quality trades people. Others fear yet another policy direction which may inhibit flexibility.

**Policy statements** are not necessary in relation to school timetabling but schools need to rethink enrolment requirements. Schools are faced with conflicting issues and imposed barriers to students participating in SATs such as staffing ratios for number of students in attendance at school, fee charges in private schools if a student is in the workplace for two days a week, number of subjects needed to gain an OP and number of contact hours for students in each subject studied.

**Schools are challenged to be creative in the way subjects are offered and timetabled to senior students. Students undertaking a SAT should not be penalised by missing classes on the day they attend the workplace, nor should they be required to “catch up” on work missed.** SATs need to be equal in status to any school subject; however, attitudes currently tend to see non-OP students more likely to undertake SATs as it is perceived they can miss other classes. This attitude ensures that SATs are considered as being suitable for students who are not capable of nor interested in, further study. All senior students need to keep all options open for employment and further study.

It is possible for the Senior Phase of Learning to be extended over a period of time as the QCE does not need to be completed in two years. It would be worth considering block release for SATs for a semester each year and **extend their schooling to a Year 13**. However some private schools may have difficulty with this concept. Respondents suggest students are better to go to the work place fulltime or part time after Year 12.

To build flexibility for SATs, one respondent suggested SATs students would be more likely to maintain 12-15 hrs work/week plus training as well as remain OP eligible if the number of semester units required for an OP were change to 16 instead of 20.

Private school respondents have noted the need to promote SATs as being for all students SATs should not be portrayed in isolation from mainstream students. The philosophy of gaining an OP and a SAT must be maintained.

The Australian Technical Colleges, if offering training for Certificate III courses to SATs, may need to extend the time to obtain the qualification beyond the traditional two years, especially if qualifications are in the trade shortage areas.

Does the **current conversion policy** provide a fair reflection of “time served” as a SAT? Would counting actual days spent in work and training for conversion purposes be cumbersome and administratively inefficient for both the employer and DET? (Current policy is that a SAT converting to a full-time arrangement is credited with the equivalent of 1 year if

they have been in the SAT for 2 years (pro-rata for less time spent in the SAT. In effect an apprentice may have undertaken the equivalent of 96 days paid work over a 2 year period plus relevant formal training and be accredited with 1 year time credit. Given the limited information it is difficult to determine whether concerns are with wage progression or competencies achieved.)

Is it necessary for DET to continue to advise parties to a SAT of conversion requirements at the end of each year via mail out or is information supplied during induction adequate to achieve compliance? Are there other means to achieve compliance with conversion requirements, including “automatic” conversion at the end of schooling?

### ***Conversion Policy and Process***

Students should be credited with the competencies demonstrated both on and off-the- job according to their training plan. **Judgments should not be based on time served but on the competencies demonstrated.**

When policies are based on such strict numerical calculations, it will always be difficult to know if employer concerns are based on wage progression or competencies achieved. If confidence is to be built into the apprenticeship system, then employers need to pay for and acknowledge skills and knowledge when workers demonstrate competence. **There are very few professions where the student cannot progress at their own rate to gain qualifications.**

**It is also difficult to quantify the exact number of hours SATs spend ‘at work’** if ‘work’ refers to quality, relevant training. Is it likely that a full time apprentice spends all of the ‘on the job’ time on relevant, quality training? Do SATs gain quality ‘on the job’ type training through simulated work experiences in schools? It is better to focus on quality training rather than a time frame which may have little relevance to quality.

The conversion policy debate would be irrelevant if employers applied a competency based approach to trade training on and off the job. **Counting ‘actual’ hours or days would be administratively cumbersome and could be open to abuse.**

The conversion issue is also complicated by recent Queensland Studies Authority formula for awarding a Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE). Students who gain their Certificate in 2008 will gain points for a completed SAT (generally Certificate II) and this is equivalent to the points for 1 school subject. The time spent on the one subject and the time spent on the SAT therefore need to be fairly comparable. Students may be deterred from undertaking a SAT if the time commitment became too different from current practice.

Trainees are more likely to complete a traineeship over their senior school years and also more likely not to convert this to a part-time or full-time traineeship. Trainees tend to seek other employment opportunities or further study.

Apprentices, on the other hand, who have made good choices for themselves are more likely to convert to a full-time apprenticeship. **Conversion should be automatic for apprentices unless they or the employer notifies DET to the contrary.** Schools would appreciate being informed of the number of conversions as often this information is not forwarded to the school. **It is important that all data regarding units of competency completed and conversion advice be forwarded to students prior to November so that data can be accessed by the school and students can make decisions about their future.** After this time students are less likely to be contactable by the school.

Although following up on conversion from SAT to post school apprenticeship or traineeship is resource intensive, this is an important with respect to destination studies. It may be, however, that parents and young people need to take a more active role to ensure ‘ownership’ of the total process. With the Queensland governments Education and Training Reforms for the Future agenda, the Queensland Studies Authority will be ‘tracking’ young people to see that they stay at school or gain specified qualifications or are in employment by certain ages. It may be that the work of DET in advising parties to a SAT of the conversion procedures, could be included in the QSA and ETRF procedures and the signing of Student Education and Training Plans prepared at schools.

Is it a matter of improving education around **ETES** (Education, Training and Employment Schedule form) requirements or are there other means of ensuring relevant stakeholders fulfil the principles for which the ETES form is intended?

**Completion of the ETES form is often time-consuming but is a valuable exercise.**

Students at this time however are overwhelmed by the amount of information and tend not to comprehend all the important details. Once they commence their SAT they tend to have questions to which they seek clarification and are often unsure as to where to go to get the answers. **Regular communication between all parties is an important monitoring tool** which is often lacking.

With the support of the NACs and the Local Community Partnerships, and the focus on schools developing Student Education and Training Plans, it is hoped that the ETES form and process gain an even greater sense of importance. It may be that more promotional material (short and user-friendly) needs to be provided to stakeholders before signing up **and** at a stage during the SAT to reinforce the importance of this documentation and sharing of information. However, some say we have enough paperwork, and what we need is more face to face sharing of information and progress after the ETES form has been agreed upon. Valuing the ETES form and its links to the contractual arrangement should strengthen the SAT and enhance completion rates.

Is there an agreed need to improve consistency and understanding of **roles and responsibilities of stakeholders** and if so what models should be adopted? What is perceived to be the role of DET in the promotion of SATs, particularly in relation to education of stakeholders? Does the induction process for SATs meet participant’s needs? If not, how can greater consistency be achieved without creating “information overload”?

Is there a need to develop, share and employ consistent strategies to facilitate engagement and connection of **employers** with schools and SATs?

Is a state-wide **marketing** campaign that could include TV, radio, newspaper advertising and printed material required to maintain interest in and promote the benefits of the SATs program?

**Marketing**

**All stakeholders need to be involved in an ongoing process.** There is a greater emphasis now in Queensland schools on education and training plans. There needs to be coordination between developing plans from Year 10 to the ETES form to the training contract, and to the QSA learning account registered for each student. Ongoing progress needs to be discussed with all stakeholders and **schools need to be resourced to allow better case management of SATs.** The Australian government is supporting better career advice through funding Local Community Partnerships and Regional Industry Career Advisers. The New Apprenticeship Centres are being restructured. The challenge is **to coordinate all these groups with the**

**work of DET so that consistency and reinforcement occurs.**

**DET does have an educative role in relation to informing all stakeholders of the policies and procedures in relation to SATs.** Some state-wide marketing campaign is necessary to promote the benefits of SATs **but most promotion tends to be at a local level.** Local Community Partnerships are in a prime position to promote in their regions as they have contact with industry and schools and have the facilitation of career and transition services as part of their strategic plans. The LCP would be ideally situated to inform schools of vacancies in SATs and promote the benefits to employers. As the LCPs are placing students in structured workplace learning this is a valuable opportunity to discuss SATs.

As employers are very busy people, the time and purpose of meetings needs to be carefully planned. The Local Community Partnerships are currently working well in this area. SAT programs are increasingly becoming an LCP issue so **LCPs should be encouraged to attend any DET workshops to share relevant information.**

**Given the skills shortages, a central marketing campaign could be helpful.** The timing appears to be positive, given the release of the white paper, QSA changes to the Queensland Certificate of Education, and the acknowledgement that SATs results should contribute significantly. **The recent production of 'league tables' for schools highlighted the importance of VET as an indicator of success. Many stakeholders probably need to know more about VET in schools, especially SAT programs.**

**Information to schools and students is best communicated through a website and electronic newsletter rather than in print form.** The establishment of a website dedicated to SATs would be a valuable tool for communications and would be accessible to all schools and students in the state. The website could provide brochures, documents, forms, statistics, frequently asked questions and provide an access point for students to email questions of concern to them. It would also be useful to have further expansion of an internet based vacancy board. Many young people take the initiative and seek employment using the Internet. However, if developing a website it is important that all education sectors be involved to avoid duplication.

It would also strengthen SATs if processes and marketing could come under one ministerial portfolio, rather than both the Department of Employment and Training and Education Queensland.

Although Queensland is leading the way, there is still an untapped market given SAT programs are still perceived in many schools as a 'fall back option' if not going to university. There are probably many young people who would approach a SAT as their first option if marketing could build the status of gaining trade qualifications as opposed to going to university.

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