Australian Education Union
Submission

to the

Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training

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Introduction

The Australian Education Union (AEU) represents more than 189,000 members employed in public primary, secondary and special schools and the early childhood, TAFE and adult education sectors as teachers, educational leaders, education assistants or support staff across Australia. As such, the interests and concerns of AEU members, and those of their students, are intrinsic to all aspects of this review.

Our submission will focus on the following factors:

- Pathways for all senior secondary students from school and the resources available to school systems and to individual schools to help students choose their post school pathway

- The need to improve the available pathways for students of low Socio-Economic Status (SES) backgrounds and from rural, regional and remote backgrounds

- The impact of current vocational education policy on students who pursue vocational education during and after senior secondary school

- The current available pathways into initial teacher education (ITE) and the need to ensure that those who undertake ITE are properly supported by tertiary institutions.

The Five Most Frequent Post School Pathways

As shown by NCVER's recent analysis of a decade of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) data, which tracked the 2006 cohort of 15 year olds until age 25, the pathways chosen in senior secondary school have long term, and often lifelong social and economic implications, not only for individuals but for the whole of society.[1] The variety and complexity of many young people's pathways from education to work shown in the LSAY data and the importance of vocational education across numerous pathways demonstrates how invaluable a properly funded and supported public vocational education system is.

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[1] Ranasinghe, R, Chew, E, Knight, G & Siekmann, G., *School- to-Work* Pathways, NCVER, 2019, p6.

The five pathways taken by the 2006 LSAY cohort at age 25, and the relative frequency with which each pathways is pursued in the LSAY data profiled by NCVER, are shown below[2]:

Pathway 1: Higher education and work

This is the simplest pathway categorised by NCVER and the one with the fewest transitions between activities. The majority (60%) of the young people in this pathway have an extended period of higher education following secondary school, followed by employment.

Pathway 2: Early entry to full-time work

23% of young people followed an 'express pathway' to employment, distinguished by a short spell of post-school education or training, mostly Vocational Education and Training (VET) leading to full-time work approximately one year after leaving school. NCVER states that "for many respondents, however, it is likely that training extended beyond the early post-school years; that is, in combination with full-time work as part of an apprenticeship or traineeship."

Pathway 3: Mix of higher education and VET

This pathway comprises an extended period of higher education and VET activity, combined with short and intermittent episodes of employment, eventually leading to employment or further VET activity (8%).

Pathway 4: Mixed and repeatedly disengaged

Young people in Pathway 4 undertook repeated labour market changes, with periods of disengagement from the labour force or of being 'not in education, employment nor training'. While only a small proportion of the sample (5%) fell into this category, it indicates tenuous labour market attachment.

Pathway 5: Mostly working part-time

The 4% of the sample followed in this pathway, and entered the labour market relatively early following school and are mostly employed part-time.

The NCVER pathways study shows that pathways are to a large extent frequently determined by young people's Socio-Economic Status (SES), by location and level of remoteness, level of disadvantage across numerous realms and by whether students undertook vocational subjects during secondary school. The breakdown of number and type of transitions and the employment rate at age 25 for each pathway in the NCVER study demonstrates the importance of ensuring that entry and transition between all appropriate pathways remain open to senior secondary students and that they are not locked in to particular post school routes at an early stage.

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[2]*Ibid,* p16

For example, Pathway 1 (higher education and work) is the smoothest transition from school to higher education to full time work. However, more than three quarters of this group is from a metropolitan area and 43% are from the highest SES quartile.[3] Pathway 2 "early entry into full time work" has the highest employment rate at age 25 years (97.4%) and is the most predominantly male pathway, and the pathway with the highest proportion of young people in technical and trades occupations. Pathway 4 (mixed and repeatedly disengaged) has the highest proportions of vulnerable youth, and the highest levels of disability and of early school leavers and the lowest SES of the five pathways.[4]

There are entrenched perceptions amongst students, parents and the wider community about the relative merit of various pathways. VET focused pathways, in particular, can often be seen as inferior to university by students and their parents. *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System*, chaired by Steven Joyce, found that many of the reviews' participants raised these concerns about the VET sector, many of which directly impact on the way in which the pathway is perceived, on the esteem that VET is held in, and on the ease of access (or lack of it) for secondary students into appropriate VET courses. The issues that contributed to this perception, as raised in the Joyce review include:

- Continuing variations in quality between providers, and concerns about the relationship between the regulator and providers.

- A cumbersome qualifications system.

- A complicated and inconsistent funding system that is hard to understand and navigate, and which is not well matched to skills needs.

- A lack of clear and useful information on vocational careers for prospective new entrants.

- Unclear secondary school pathways into the VET sector and a strong dominance of university pathways.[5]

It is essential that young people from all locations across Australia and from all backgrounds have access to all available post school pathways so that they are able to explore all options and choose the most appropriate one for them, without restriction. There is a significant and urgent need to improve the esteem in which VET pathways are held, which can only be done through the restoration of a properly funded and fully accessible public TAFE system. Yet the most recent funding data from NCVER shows that Commonwealth funding of VET fell by $326 million (10.6%) in 2018 due to the drive towards ever greater privatisation of VET provision.[6]

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[3] *Ibid,* p.19
[4] *Ibid,* p.19
[5] Joyce, S, *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System*, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019, p.27
[6] Retrieved from https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/government-funding-of-vet-2018

The Impact of VET in Schools on Available Pathways

Every school should be equipped to provide a comprehensive education for their students. VET should be introduced from year 10 onwards as an additional component to complement the comprehensive education in the national curriculum received in schools. Many of the issues raised above can be addressed early by ensuring that VET provision in schools appropriately meets the needs of the students undertaking it.

While the total amount of VET taught in schools has reduced in recent years, the most significant decline has been in the level of qualifications taught. Accredited qualifications taught as VET in schools have reduced from over 46,275 to 25,855 from 2014 to 2018 and non-accredited training packages now total 315,635, down from 340,000 in 2014. However, these non-accredited training package qualifications still comprise the vast majority of VET program enrolments at over 92% of VET taught in schools.

Nearly 70% of VET taught programs in schools are at certificate 1 and 2 level, and more than 60% of VET in schools is taught in government schools. And more than half is taught at certificate II level, whereas although a much lower number of VET programs are completed at independent schools, the program level at independent schools is much more evenly split across Certificate II and Certificate III.[7] These differences point to a systemic and chronic lack of resource available in public school systems, which prevents public schools from being able to provide the full breadth of certificate level qualifications and increases the potential for significant narrowing of the pathways and options available to public school students engaged in VET whilst at school.

This differentiation in the level of programs offered to students in the public and independent schooling sectors raises the significant and important question of whether there is a systemic reason, such as a lack of funding and resources that inhibits the ability of public schools to provide higher level courses. The insufficient recurrent funding provided to public schools through the combined failure of the Commonwealth and state/territory governments to meet the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) often results in students funding their own VET studies in school and further limits access. This raises the question of the extent to which students 'capacity to pay additional fees for VET enrolment impacts on the type and level of programs offered.

The AEU has identified several systemic issues with the current provision of VET in Schools as outlined below. All of these issues could be rectified through the proper allocation of resources to meet the SRS in public schools and through the reinstatement of public TAFE as the provider of VET in schools:

- The transfer of recurrent funding from public schools to private RTOs.

- The requirement, caused by a lack of sufficient recurrent funding to schools, that students additionally fund their own VET courses with private RTOs arranged via schools.

- The potential for a lack of direct knowledge of and responsibility for oversight and co-ordination of VET in schools policy and implementation in state and territory education departments.

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[7] NVCER, *VET in schools data slicer*, https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/all-data/vet-in-schools-2018-data-slicer 2019

- As outlined above, accredited and higher level qualifications are declining in schools in favour of lower level qualifications and non-accredited training is still the vast majority of VET in schools.

- The VET system is structured around the needs of industry and current quality measures reflect this. However, schools have much wider responsibilities than meeting the needs of industry and the economy and these are often not properly considered in the delivery of VET in Schools.

- There is currently no consistent way to collect data about students perceptions of their satisfaction with school based VET programs, or on the appropriateness of programs undertaken to future pathways.

Recommendation 1: All state and territory education systems should ensure that their senior management group includes someone with direct knowledge of and responsibility for oversight and co-ordination of VET in schools policy and implementation.

Recommendation 2: The provision of VET to secondary school students should be underpinned by cooperative arrangements between schools and TAFE, the public provider of vocational education.

Recommendation 3: VET in Schools should be funded from a specific budget directed to TAFE for that purpose rather than provided by for profit RTOs diverting resources from public schools, and/or requiring students to fund provision themselves through additional charges.

Recommendation 4: Funding for TAFE must be increased and allocated in order to support services provided to schools so that schools and students are not denied access due to cost.

Recommendation 5: Class sizes for VET in Schools should not exceed those for the same course in a TAFE college.

Recommendation 6: Any person delivering VET in schools should have a sound understanding of pedagogical principles, including the importance of consolidation and context for learning, should be properly qualified to deliver VET and meet state and territory registration requirements

Recommendation 7: That data, such as that delivered by NCVER's Graduate Outcomes Survey, is collected from secondary students enrolled in VET in order to provide a national picture of VET students' motivations for enrolling, their satisfaction with the course or their outcomes.

The Quality of Careers Advice in Schools and its Impact on Chosen pathways

Although separation into academic or vocational streams is not a feature of the Australian secondary system, there is no doubt that students are often encouraged to pursue particular pathways quite early in secondary school according to their observed strengths. There is a need for enhanced career and vocational guidance to prevent students being unofficially streamed prematurely into either VET or university studies in this way.

It is generally considered more practical for schools (for example, in terms of administrative planning, curriculum and assessment workload, and teacher time) to offer VET separately or as a standalone course than to embed it into general education courses. This means that students are far more likely to be unofficially "streamed" into either VET or traditional academic routes once VET in school is offered.

It is for this reason that it is critically important that school systems have capacity to provide frequent, high quality and accessible careers advice to students. Inadequate recurrent funding, (now locked until 2023 through bi-lateral National School reform Agreements which fail to meet the SRS in all states and territories except the ACT) means that public schools simply do not have the resources to invest in career and guidance counsellors. The clear result of this systemic lack of investment has been a decline in the quality of career advice offered to students. In Victoria, a recent review of careers advice offered in schools found that "career development is not meeting the needs of students".[8] Nationally, studies show that young people who can recall four separate and structured career activities across their school life are five times less likely to be unemployed or disengaged from education or training post school. Despite this, there is a dearth of government investment in structured schools based career advice, which leads to the outcome that approximately 50% of schools in Australia with populations of over 1000 students spend less than $3 per student on career guidance.[9] The provision of properly and separately funded careers advice, delivered by qualified teaching professionals and available to all senior secondary students, should be a priority for all state and territory education departments.

The impact of careers advice on the perception or esteem with which different pathways are held is particularly apparent in Victoria. Careers advice has previously been directed towards Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), and students and parents were given signals that supports this view - those who undertake VCE get a score and take exams, which are intrinsically identified by students, parents and the community with rigour, challenge and success.

In all state and territories, as in Victoria, some significant shifts are required for VET to be viewed as being as valuable as an academic pathway. Some suggestions for improving the presentation of vocational pathways to secondary students and their parents include:

- An increase in the quantity, quality and accessibility of information presented to parents, as the AEU has heard anecdotally that parents often block students from this path because they value the ATAR more highly than alternative paths.

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[8] Parliament of Victoria, *Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools*, retrieved from https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/eejsc/Career_Advice_Activities/EEJSC_58-04_Text_WEB.pdf

[9] Bowen, G & Kidd, E, Career Advice: The Missing Link in School to Work Transitions, Youth Action Policy Paper , 2017, p.8

- Students in communities with specialised or novel industries should be provided greater exposure to all facets of these industries, and to the supporting industries that supplement them. Students need clear information about pathways into those industries.

- Accurate information should be provided to students about the total cost of different pathways including the cost of materials and travel.

- Accurate information should be provided to students on accessing and completing structured work placement as employers are often reluctant to take on inexperienced students for placements.

- Careers advisors need a comprehensive knowledge of how VET qualifications (as well as university education) are delivered and are aligned to employer needs or schools need to build closer relationships with TAFE so that TAFE teachers and student counsellors can provide accurate advice to secondary students on vocational education pathways.

The AEU supports the idea for change from the Review's discussion paper of providing each senior secondary student an advisor who knows the student well, and is able to investigate career options specifically tailored to that student.[10] We emphasise that this would only be possible if there was to be a significant increase in funding to schools, and that any such advisors should not be tied to any profit making enterprise or have a commercial imperative to recommend or encourage students to take any particular pathway. Additionally, the AEU asserts that all those undertaking this role must be fully qualified and registered teachers.

Recommendation 8: That state and territory education departments fund qualified and registered teachers as careers advisors for senior secondary students, with each student having access to a named advisor who knows them.

Pathways and Socio-Economic Status

Students from low SES backgrounds need more support before and during senior secondary school to ensure that options are not unnecessary closed and to ensure that all appropriate pathways remain open to them.

The AEU's State of our Schools survey 2018 provides an insight to factors such as SES impact on teacher shortages, which in turn can result in out of field teaching (particularly in the STEM subjects) and the restriction of subjects and curriculum areas available for students to study.

Table 1, below, shows the percentage of schools that have experienced teacher shortages in the last year by SES. While teacher shortages are prevalent at over 55% of public schools regardless of location, two thirds of schools that educate low SES students experience teacher shortages. They are more likely to impact in low SES communities at close to double the number of that in high SES communities.

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[10] *The Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training: Discussion Paper,* 2019, p12

Table 1

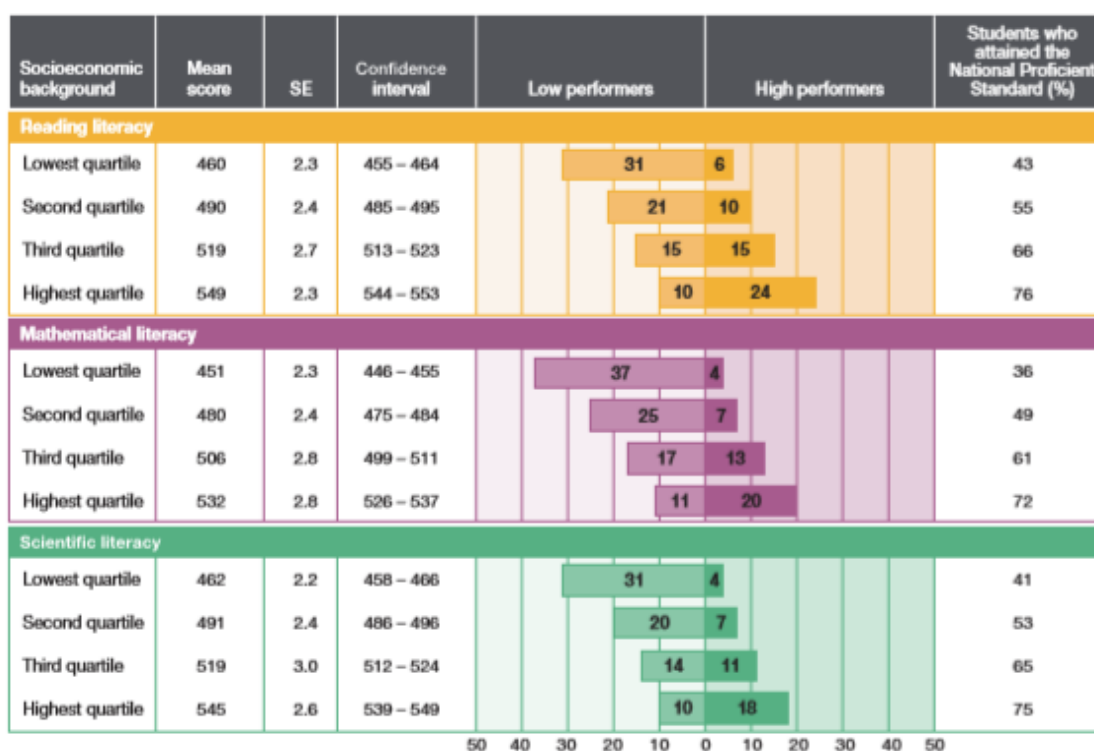|		Has your school experienced teacher shortages in the last year?			
		Yes		No	
		(n)	%	(n)	%
SES	Low Socioeconomic Status	212	65.8%	110	34.2%
	Medium Socioeconomic Status	183	61.0%	117	39.0%
	High Socioeconomic Status	28	37.8%	46	62.2%

PISA shows that in Australia there is extensive evidence that equity is a significant factor in student performance, with students from high SES backgrounds consistently performing better than students from low SES backgrounds. Across all domains students from high SES backgrounds performed better than those from low SES backgrounds, and the proportion of high performers increased and the proportion of low performers decreased with each increase in SES quartile.

Across all three domains in PISA 2018, students form the highest SES quartile performed on average, about three years of schooling higher than students in the lowest quartile.

- **Science**: The variance between average scores of highest and lowest SES quartiles was 82 points, with 30 points equivalent to one year of schooling, so the difference is approximately two and three quarters years of schooling

- **Reading**: The variance between average scores of highest and lowest SES quartiles was 89 points, with 30 points equivalent to one year of schooling, so the difference is three years of schooling

- **Maths**: The variance between average scores of highest and lowest SES quartiles was 81 points, with 30 points equivalent to one year of schooling, so the difference is two and two thirds years of schooling

31% of low SES students are classed as "low performers" in reading, 37% in maths and 31% in science. Only 6% of low SES students are "high performers" in reading, and only 4% in both maths and science.

Table 2   Australian PISA results 2018 by geographic Socioeconomic background[11]

Socioeconomic background	Mean score	SE	Confidence interval	Low performers	High performers	Students who attained the National Proficient Standard (%)
Reading literacy						
Lowest quartile	460	2.3	455 – 464	31	6	43
Second quartile	490	2.4	485 – 495	21	10	55
Third quartile	519	2.7	513 – 523	15	15	66
Highest quartile	549	2.3	544 – 553	10	24	76
Mathematical literacy						
Lowest quartile	451	2.3	446 – 455	37	4	36
Second quartile	480	2.4	475 – 484	25	7	49
Third quartile	506	2.8	499 – 511	17	13	61
Highest quartile	532	2.8	526 – 537	11	20	72
Scientific literacy						
Lowest quartile	462	2.2	458 – 466	31	4	41
Second quartile	491	2.4	486 – 496	20	7	53
Third quartile	519	3.0	512 – 524	14	11	65
Highest quartile	545	2.6	539 – 549	10	18	75

50 40 30 20 10 0 10 20 30 40 50

Although school systems and individual schools themselves no doubt strive to retain as many varied pathway options for students as possible, the LSAY data shows some very strong outcome probabilities, most strongly linked to SES. The modelling of pathways in the NCVER LSAY study shows that "personal backgrounds are also shown by the modelling to play a role, with a less advantaged socioeconomic background raising the probability of Pathway 2."[12] Furthermore, the study finds that:

> *In terms of the socioeconomic background, individuals from lower SES quartiles are associated with a lower probability of following the dominant Pathway 1: Higher education and work. For example, the probability that a young person from the lowest SES quartile enters Pathway 1 is, on average, 20 percentage points lower than that for an individual from the highest SES quartile. On the other hand, coming from the third quartile or lowest socioeconomic background is associated with a 12-percentage point higher probability (than the highest SES individuals) of entering Pathway 2.[13]*

Additionally, NCVER found that the probability that a young person who studied vocational subjects in school then follows Pathway 1, the higher education and work pathway, is, on average, 20 percentage points lower than for an individual who did not take any vocational subjects in school, and the probability that a young person who studied vocational subjects in school subsequently follows Pathway 2 (higher education and work) is, on average, 13 percentage points higher than for an individual who did not take any vocational subjects in

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[11] Thompson, S, De Bortoli L, Underwood C & Schmid, M. *PISA 2018, PISA in Brief: Student Performance*, Australian Council for Educational Research, 2019, p.18
[12] Ranasinghe, et al., *Op. Cit. p8*
[13] *Ibid.,* p. *35*

school.[14] As noted by Zoellner, "students in the most disadvantaged areas suffer a much greater loss of choice and access to training when compared to the most advantaged groups"[15]

Recommendation 9: There needs to be a systemic enhancement of career and vocational guidance services in schools to provide improved and accessible advice on all pathways, with a particular emphasis on offering increased support to senior secondary students from the lowest SES quartile.

The March Towards Micro-Credentials and Low Quality VET

It is clear that there is a significant drive from both the Commonwealth government and the private VET lobby towards the increased use of micro-credentials, and along with this, the related decline of accredited qualifications provided by TAFE institutes.

The Skills Council, established in August 2019 by COAG, met on Friday 22nd November 2019 and subsequently issued a communique[16] which identifies their priority areas of reform. The first identified area is the increased focus "on the use of micro-credentials in the national VET system to better respond to student and job-need while preserving the importance of nationally-recognised full qualifications", followed by "streamlining training packages to deliver more relevant skills for industry and individuals through immediate actions to make the current system faster, simpler and better. This will include immediate action to identify and remove all outdated and unused qualifications to improve the relevance and accessibility of the training system."[17] On closer inspection on the language of the communique, the increased focus on the use of micro-credentials and the streamlining of training packages to deliver more relevant skills for industry would seem to be entirely at odds with the Council's supposed aim of "preserving the importance of nationally-recognised full qualifications".

The AEU has significant concerns about the increased drive towards the use of micro-credentials in the VET system, as demonstrated by the announcement quoted above, and in particular, we are concerned about their use as the foundation from which senior secondary students' future pathways into employment are determined.

Micro-credentials gathered from a series of short competency based training activities are not equivalent in depth of learning to an accredited qualification. A rounded full qualification is the best way to pursue a vocational pathway, and this is best provided by properly funded and resourced public TAFE institutes.

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[14] *Ibid.,* pp. 33-35

[15] Zoellner, D., *How good is choice in the VTE market? 'Not very' says big data*, The Australian TAFE Teacher, spring 2019, Vol. 53/3, p.26

[16]COAG communique 22 November 2019 , retrieved from https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/skills_council_-_22_november_2019_-_communique_final.pdf

[17] *Ibid.*

The AEU does not support the increased use of micro-credentials as the focus of VET delivery in schools. The AEU believes that vocational education should be delivered with the aim of providing those undertaking it with a significant and broad skills base to work in their chosen profession, not to provide students with a set of narrow skills or competencies to fulfil a specific employer need at a particular time. We are also opposed to the idea that a substantive qualification, whether a higher level certificate, a diploma or a degree can be cobbled together in any effective way from the completion of a series of disjointed micro-credentials completed by assessing individual competencies in an ad hoc way.

Further the AEU is particularly concerned about the Commonwealth government's response to the Joyce review and its recommendations to provide "modern and flexible alternative to classroom based learning" and to "enhance the role of industry in designing training courses by establishing a national skills commission". This sole prioritisation of immediate industry needs over those of students and the community is overwhelmingly short sighted, and will only result in young people having to start numerous pathways, before retraining to meet the short term needs of employers. Such an approach does not allow for the development of a sustainable long term career or for the development of real qualifications leading to long term secure employment.

Private VET providers often offer a high volume of low quality courses, and recent data shows that the total number and proportion of VET studies taking place that are not part of nationally accredited courses has increased substantially in recent years.

- Students enrolled in nationally-recognised programs [such as TAFE] decreased by 5.9% to two million people in 2018, compared with 2017, and decreased by 16.2% between 2015 to 2018

- Students enrolled in subjects not delivered as part of a nationally-recognised program increased by 4.9% to 2.5 million people in 2018, compared with 2017 and increased by 46.6% to 2.5 million from 2015 to 2018.

- Overall student numbers decreased by 1.5% to 4.1 million people in 2018, compared with 201718

Additionally, 2018 data released in December 2019 shows that funding for all certificate levels qualifications continues to fall year on year and that the only area of growth is for "funding not attributable by level of education".

In 2018, compared with 2017:

- Spending on diploma or higher level programs decreased by $26.7 million (7.6%) to $322.0 million.

- Spending on certificate IV programs decreased by $16.1 million (4.5%) to $343.1 million.

- Spending on certificate III programs decreased by $43.5 million (3.1%) to $1.4 billion

- Spending on certificate I, II and other programs decreased by $98.3 million (11.3%) to $772.5 million.

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[18]Retrieved from https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0031/6925090/Total-VET-students-and-courses-2018.pdf

- Funding not attributable by level of education increased by $202.4 million (12.1%) to $1.9 billion.[19]

The fact that subjects not delivered as part of accredited national programs and those with no discernible qualification attached are the primary area of significant enrolment growth for VET studies in the last three years is of significant concern for the consideration of young people's pathways. The subjects may or may not lead to careers and function primarily as an income boon for profit seeking private providers. There is no way to determine how useful these subjects are to those who take them or whether they contribute to the attainment of thorough capability based qualifications.

The Impact of Competency Based Training (CBT) on the Quality of Pathways Offered

CBT is a fragmented, atomistic model of curriculum based on behaviourist notions of knowledge and skill, embedded in a fragmented model of qualifications and a fragmented VET system, all designed to serve a fragmented market based on exchanges between putatively ontologically distinct rational self-maximising individuals.[20]

Quality should centre on a thorough, rounded and holistic learning process, where qualifications are attained through the demonstration of a deep understanding of the subject area including both the practical application of learning and a demonstrated understanding of the theory underpinning it. In Australia's current vocational education sector, the narrow focus on Competency Based Training (CBT) trivialises vocational education and creates a disjointed and fragmented learning model which estranges learner, teacher and institution from each other and forfeits opportunities for the discovery and extension of knowledge. According to the CBT model, learning can take place anywhere, at any time and is usually assessed against a narrow range of defined tasks, the completion of which requires no genuine understanding.

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[19] Retrieved from https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/government-funding-of-vet-2018

[20] Wheelahan, L. (2016). *Patching bits won't fix vocational education in Australia - a new model is needed*, International Journal of Training Research, p.3.

The CBT curriculum model has no requirement for structured teaching or a dedicated learning environment, and is indifferent to the quality of teachers and educational institutions.[21] The separation of education, training and assessment under the CBT model is designed to remove the human complexities from vocational education, and to reshape these interactions into separate and distinct activities, a process that lends each individual part of the CBT model and the entire process itself more easily to being carved up for greater profitability in a fully marketised training sector. In a quality educational environment, education, training and assessment cannot be separated as all three components are present in all activities.[22] CBT based training packages have dominated what is now the vocational education market in Australia. According to Wheelahan (2016), the market in CBT based training packages was originally meant to ensure national consistency and quality but has instead resulted in:

> [L]ow-quality qualifications in a market where arguably it is too easy for providers to gain accreditation. The question that policy asked was 'how can we create a market', and not 'how can we create a system of high-quality, trusted qualifications'. It was assumed that training packages would provide the consistency needed to ensure quality, however, training packages have facilitated the crisis of quality because they are arguably low quality to start with, and because providers take the training package off the shelf to deliver it. There is no requirement that they invest in developing their own qualifications or curriculum and subject that to external scrutiny through processes of accreditation.[23]

Over time the administration and oversight of this market of CBT based training packages has become an industry in itself, with vast amounts of public funding expended to maintain a network of "advisory" and other bodies, to oversee a growing number of qualifications which are often of questionable quality at best, and usually of very limited use to either individuals or employers.

Recommendation 10: The primacy of TAFE as the public vocational education provider of full qualifications within a nationally accredited course of study should be asserted by the review.

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[21] Australian Education Union (2018), *Submission to the Terms of Reference for the ALP Commission of Inquiry into post-secondary education*, p.8.
[22] Australian Education Union, (2016), *AEU feedback to the Department of Education and Training's Quality of assessment in vocational education and training discussion paper,* p.3.
[23] Wheelahan, L. *Op. cit.*¸ p.10.

The Need for Higher Admission Standards for Senior Secondary Pathways into Teaching Through Initial Teacher Education

As the voice of Australia's public school teaching profession, the AEU is concerned with pathways into Initial Teacher Education (ITE). It is imperative to provide suitable pathways for senior secondary students into teaching however this must be done in a manner which does not lower the entry standards for secondary graduates entering ITE. The AEU is gravely concerned about the long term trends brought on by the deregulation of modern higher education in Australia. This meant that the academic standards required to enter many tertiary courses, including initial teachers' education courses, are significantly lower than they should be, and lower than standards were in previous decades. A consequence of this decline in standards is a massive increase in the numbers of people undertaking ITE - in 2001 there were 54,000 people training to be teachers, in 2016 there were over 87,000.[24] In order to bolster the capabilities and status of the teaching profession it is imperative that this long term but recently accelerated decline in ITE entry standards is urgently reversed.

Due to the highly deregulated nature of the university entrance system in Australia, we also strongly believe that entry to Initial Teacher Education from school should require a minimum ATAR or equivalent measures at a level such that ensures that those pursuing a pathway towards ITE degrees have the necessary capabilities to develop long term teaching careers.

For many years the AEU has advocated for the consistent application of high level ITE, and we again reiterate our commitment to ensure that ITE providers uphold the qualification benchmarks that reinforce the higher level of knowledge, skills and expertise required to be a proficient teacher in contemporary public education. The process to register ITE programs must be rigorous and uphold the high standards expected by the teaching profession.

The worst case scenario in Australia's deregulated and under-funded higher education system would be one where ITE applicants are treated as cash cows by tertiary institutions, and an ever increasing number of ITE students are admitted with lower (or undisclosed) Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) scores and their fees are used by universities to cross subsidise the more in demand and more expensive courses on offer. This scenario would have dire implications for the status of the teaching profession and for Australian school students in the future. Unfortunately, the current low and declining average ATAR scores for ITE courses are consistent with just such a situation.[25]

The AEU's position is that minimum entry requirements should be adopted for selection into ITE to recruit the top 30% of students into the profession, with equivalent measures for those seeking entrance to ITE from points/pathways other than completion of schooling. This standard is not currently maintained in recruitment to ITE, and is actually declining. According to the most recent data from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), the number of students entering ITE via a secondary education pathway with an ATAR lower than 70 has grown from 25% in 2006 to 42% in 2015.[26]

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[24] NSW Department of Education (2018), *Workforce profile of NSW Teaching Profession 2016,* p. 24
[25] Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2017), *Insights. Initial teacher education: data report 2017,* Retrieved from https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/research-evidence/ite-data-report/2017/ite-data-report-2017.pdf?sfvrsn=a33fe93c_2
[26] *Ibid*, p.21

Dr Rachel Wilson of the University of Sydney has conducted an analysis of the ATAR scores of secondary students admitted to ITE from 2006 to 2015. It shows a rapid increase of students admitted to ITE without providing an ATAR to their university over last decade, coupled with a marked decline in high achieving students with ATARs of 70 or greater entering ITE. The trend from 2013 onwards shows a marked decline in the number of high performing students with ATARs of 70 and above admitted to ITE in conjunction with a long term trend from 2010 onwards, of places on ITE courses have increasingly been filled with students with ATARs of less than 60 with a steady increase of those with ATARs of less than 50 also being admitted to ITE.[27]

Figure 1   All domestic undergraduate students admitted to ITE on the basis of secondary education (2006 – 2015)[28]
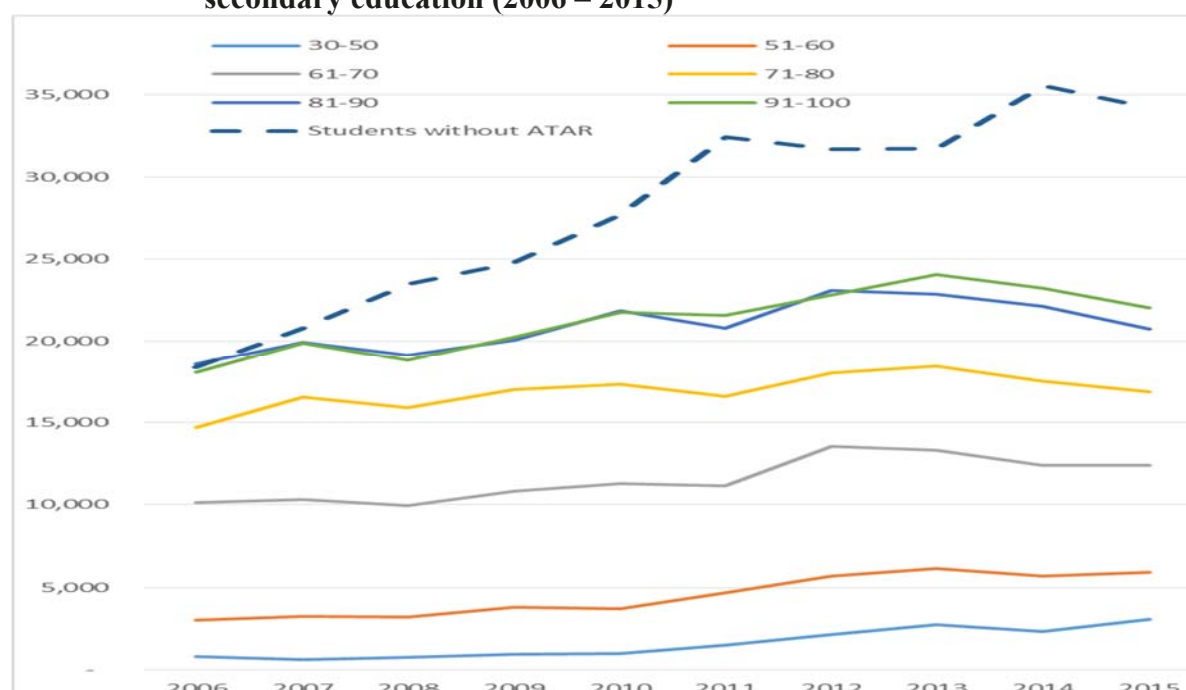
[27] Wilson, R., *Standards and Transparency in Intake to Teacher Education,* presentation to NSW Education Standards Authority, (April 12, 2018)

[28] Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, cited in Wilson, *Op. cit.*

Figure 2   All domestic undergraduate students admitted to ITE with an ATAR score of 30-50 (2006 – 2015)[29]
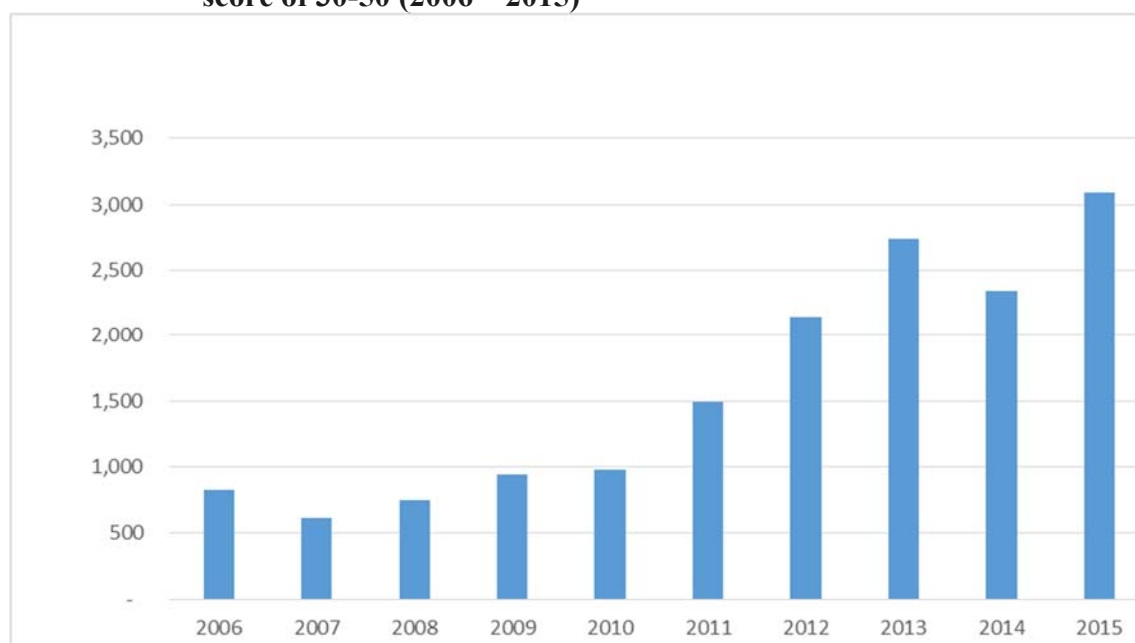
To improve the status of minimum entry requirements for students pursuing ITE from senior secondary school should be adopted for selection into ITE to recruit the top 30 per cent of students into the profession, with equivalent measures for those seeking entrance to ITE from points/pathways other than the completion of schooling.

Research conducted by Ingvarson et al shows that high performing countries have strict controls over access to ITE. For example, in Canada ITE institutions 'select trainees from the top 30 per cent of cohorts and pre-service teachers must have high grade point averages to gain entry to teacher training'.[30] In Singapore ITE applicants are subjected to a meticulous screening process. Decent wages and conditions along with job security were also factors in bolstering demand in all of the countries studied. Demand for ITE places in Finland significantly outstrips supply: only 10% of applicants are accepted into primary teacher training courses and consequently there are very high course completion rates, especially considering that the minimum qualification to become a primary or secondary teacher is a master's degree.[31]

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[29] Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, cited in Wilson, *Op. cit.*

[30] Ingvarson, L., Reid, K., Buckley, S., Kleinhenz, E., Masters, G., Rowley , G. (t, 2014). Best Practice Teacher Education Programs and Australia's Own Programs. Canberra: Department of Education. Retrieved from http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1014&context=teacher_education, p.53

[31] *Ibid. p.53*

Unfortunately this is not the case in Australia. Ingvarson describes the current state of low ATAR entry to ITE as "more of a recruitment problem than a selection problem" and argues that "tougher selection alone will not ensure that many more of our brightest graduates will see teaching as an attractive, high status career option and increase demand for places."[32] He cites the results of surveys of secondary school students that show that although they see teaching as an important profession, the most able secondary students indicate that the lack of long term salary progression and career status prevents them from considering a career in teaching.

It has been the experience of AEU members that many tertiary education providers are extremely reluctant to fail students in ITE courses, despite very strong advice from practicum supervising teachers employed in schools. This only sets up the pre-service teacher and their future students for failure and eventual "burn out".

The risk of the above is particularly acute in jurisdictions which use the alternative authority to teach to bring unqualified and under-qualified people into classrooms. There is no evidence that this practice is in the interests of student learning, helps promote high standards or is a suitable mechanism for attracting and retaining people to the profession.

Evidence from the implementation of programs such as Teach for Australia (TFA) actually demonstrates the reverse; that it undermines quality and retention.

Where they have been implemented, such programs have been clearly demonstrated not to have a sustainable impact on teaching quality. Graduates are ill-prepared for the role and have a substantially higher drop-out rate from the profession than their fully qualified peers. Targeting the least qualified and experienced teachers to the most disadvantaged communities is not just counterintuitive; the model has not succeeded in its stated goals anywhere it has been implemented.

It is for these reasons that fast-tracked pathways into teaching such as the TFA program are detrimental to the quality and status of the teaching profession. The program is expensive, with the Commonwealth having provided $57 million for the program from 2008–09 to 2017–18, followed by additional funding of $20.5 million to 2020–21[33] (an investment that has yielded a total of alumni of 650) and saddled with high attrition rates. The evaluation report commissioned by the Commonwealth Department for Education and Training from management consultancy firm Dandolo Partners, shows that within a year of completing their two year placement more than a third of TFA associates have already stopped teaching, and that after three years less than half of all TFA associates are still employed as teachers.[34] The estimated cost of training each Teach for Australia alumnus who remains in the profession for at least three years is close to a quarter of a million dollars.[35]

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[32] *Ibid. p.xiii*

[33] Answer to Question on Notice No. SQ17-000482, Additional Estimates 2016-2017, cited at http://www.saveourschools.com.au/teachers/teach-for-australia-fails-in-its-mission

[34] Dandolo Partners (2017). *Teach for Australia Program Evaluation Report*. retrieved from https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final_tfa_public_report.pdf, p.16

[35] Total Commonwealth funding provided to Teach for Australia ($77.5 million) divided estimated maximum total alumni still working as teachers after three years (650/2)

The AEU is committed to a minimum four year undergraduate degree qualification for teachers, with a move to a five year equivalent qualification requirement for post-graduate teaching qualifications, and will oppose any lowering of qualification benchmarks from ITE providers or a registration authority.

Australia needs a systemic approach to preparing teachers for a successful career in the classroom and a more rigorous threshold to ensure that every teacher is actually ready to teach. If both are done well – and graduates gain secure forms of well-paid employment - a teaching credential becomes more meaningful and the status of the profession is upheld. The top-performing countries spend substantial time and resources to ensure that standards, programs and entry assessments are aligned and coherent. As found by the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG), the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Professional Standards) and the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures provide a strong foundation for improvement and the maintenance of quality in ITE, however, they are not being effectively applied and implementation timeframes are too slow.

Teaching, like other respected professions, must have a universal assessment process for entry that includes rigorous preparation centred on academic study and professional experience, an in-depth test of subject and pedagogical knowledge, and a comprehensive teacher-readiness assessment.

Quality ITE preparation programs must be marked by higher entry standards, continuing performance standards, and exit standards, and must conclude with a strong induction program. Joint responsibility and support ITE providers, the profession, schools and employing authorities is required for this endeavour.

Recommendation 11: That minimum entry requirements should be adopted for selection into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to recruit the top 30% of students into the profession, with equivalent measures for those seeking entrance to ITE from points/pathways other than completion of schooling.
Recommendation 12: That a range of measures are adopted by all ITE providers to ensure candidates for entry, in addition to high academic standards, display motivation, aptitude, capacity and commitment.

Recommendation 13: That there is an urgent review of the use by some providers of predominantly online delivery for ITE, including a thorough published comparison of attrition, retention and compliance with the graduate and proficient career stages of those who received their training through primarily online delivery and those who did not.

Recommendation 14: In order to attract high achieving secondary graduates to ITE, teaching must be able to compete with in demand professions in terms of the level of continued and career long salary progression and professional development opportunities it provides, and that the funding and provision of ITE places be better coordinated in response to assessments of projected demand for teachers.
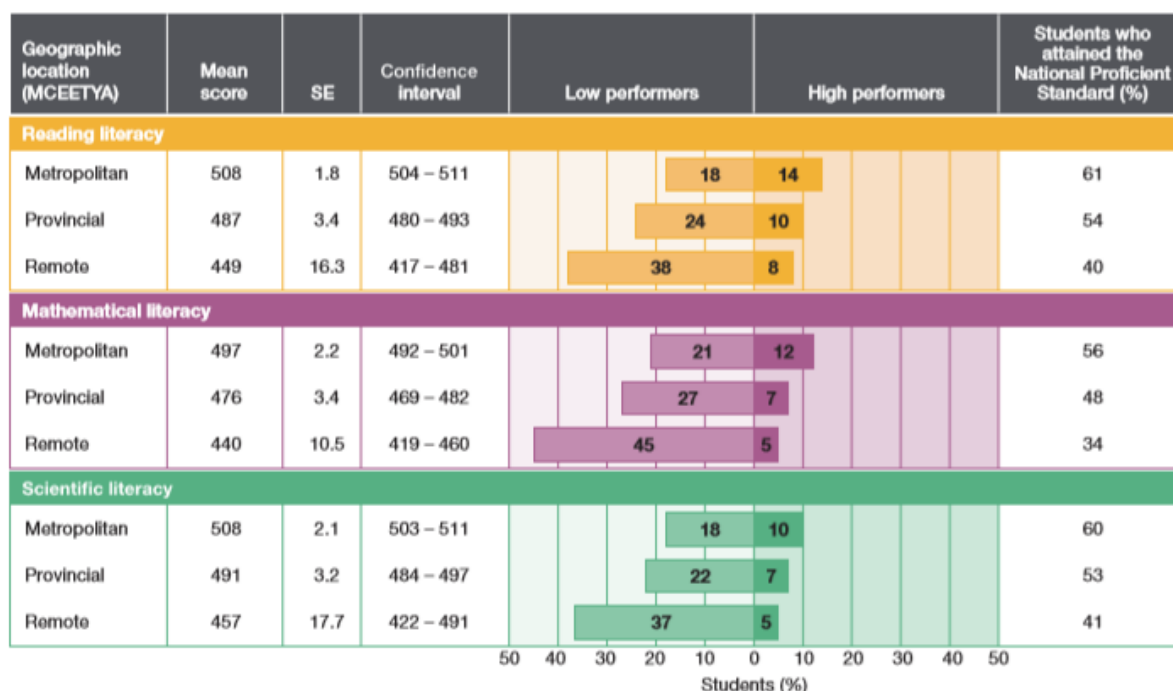
Recommendation 15: That the Education Council develop a strategy and timeline to transition initial teacher education courses to two-year post graduate qualifications. Further, in order to protect the quality of school education, Commonwealth, state and territory governments should not fund or accredit "fast-tracked" initial teacher education programs such as Teach for Australia or similar. Comprehensive workforce planning should be undertaken across the states and territories, to provide more focussed and better resourced delivery of ITE and maximise the retention of high quality entrants and graduates in the teacher workforce.

The Need to Ensure Access for Rural, Regional and Remote, and Low SES Students to all Positive Pathways

It is well known that there are differential outcomes for post-compulsory students in metropolitan and non-metropolitan schools including a lower rate of Year 12 completion, and lower levels of participation in higher education for non-metropolitan students. As it was with SES, this is starkly demonstrated by Australia's PISA 2018 results for students in remote schools.

The recent PISA 2018 results show that 15 year olds in remote locations trail all others by a significant margin - 38% of low SES students are classed as "low performers" in reading, 45% in maths and 37% in science. Only 8% of remote students are "high performers" in reading, and only 5% in both maths and science.

Table 3   Australian PISA results 2018 by geographic location[36]

Geographic location (MCEETYA)	Mean score	SE	Confidence interval	Low performers	High performers	Students who attained the National Proficient Standard (%)
Reading literacy						
Metropolitan	508	1.8	504 – 511	18	14	61
Provincial	487	3.4	480 – 493	24	10	54
Remote	449	16.3	417 – 481	38	8	40
Mathematical literacy						
Metropolitan	497	2.2	492 – 501	21	12	56
Provincial	476	3.4	469 – 482	27	7	48
Remote	440	10.5	419 – 460	45	5	34
Scientific literacy						
Metropolitan	508	2.1	503 – 511	18	10	60
Provincial	491	3.2	484 – 497	22	7	53
Remote	457	17.7	422 – 491	37	5	41

[36] Thompson, S, De Bortoli L, Underwood C & Schmid, M. *PISA 2018, PISA in Brief: Student Performance*, Australian Council for Educational Research, 2019, p.16

As shown in the NCVER Pathways analysis cited earlier in this submission, young people from metropolitan areas are more likely to have numerous pathways open to them than students from regional and remote areas, more likely of any other cohort to smoothly transition from school to employment, and more likely to be able to transition into other study activities if they choose to change their pathway.

Innovative approaches are required to support regional, rural and remote students to succeed in school and to enable their transition to further study, training and employment.

Too often in regional, rural and remote schools this innovation comes about as a matter of necessity rather than from a deliberate strategy. In small regional and remote schools, teachers are often forced to teach out-of-field and a multitude of non-educational tasks are frequently performed by principals. These are examples of forced innovation, which while effective, do not contribute to student growth in the same way that properly planned innovation does.

Schools and systems that have the right levels of resources and support education departments are in a better position to strategically manage their futures rather than be managed by the often overwhelming contingencies of the everyday.

Properly funded and supported schools are able to be proactively innovative rather than forced to be reactively innovative, including in the determination of the pathway options that are made available to students.

The AEU's State of our Schools survey 2018 demonstrates how remoteness impacts on teacher shortages, which in turn can result in out of field teaching (particularly in the difficult to staff STEM subjects) and the restriction of subjects and curriculum areas available for students to study. Additionally, these shortages can often also limit the opportunities for teachers who are teaching out of field to identify the aptitudes and contribute to the guidance provided to senior secondary students.

Table 4, below, shows the percentage of schools that have experienced teacher shortages in the last year by regional and remote location. While teacher shortages are prevalent at over 55% of public schools regardless of location, according to the principals surveyed, inner regional, outer regional and very remote schools have substantially higher levels of shortages than major city schools at 67.2%, 67.2%, 63.9% and 81.8% respectively.

Table 4

| | | Has your school experienced teacher shortages in the last year? | | | |
| | | Yes | | No | |
		(n)	%	(n)	%
AREA	Major city	176	55.9%	139	44.1%
	Inner regional	78	67.2%	38	32.8%
	Outer regional	108	63.9%	61	36.1%
	Remote	44	58.7%	31	41.3%
	Very remote	18	81.8%	4	18.2%

There have been effective steps taken to try to step the impact of teacher and resource shortages in regional and remote schools. For example, outreach programs like the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) benefit from high levels of coordination between schools and universities as well as support from participating schools. According to a 2017 evaluation of HEPPP, it has "has encouraged universities to implement a wide variety of activities and projects aimed at increasing the number of low SES students interested in attending university, being prepared for and admitted to university, and progressing through and graduating from university"[37] and encouraged "a high proportion of students participating in these activities proceed to study degree programs and there is some evidence that they have higher retention rates than for students overall [and] been found to improve student confidence and preparedness for university, as well as helping to develop supportive peer relationships."[38]

Another example is the Supported Students Successful Students initiative in NSW. This policy, as well as creating 236 new school counselling service positions across the system, also provides 500 graduate scholarships to ensure that the supply of qualified staff meets demand. A similar scheme involving careers teachers/advisors could be targeted at non-metropolitan schools to raise awareness and support access to a range of further education and employment opportunities.

As outlined above in the section of this submission focusing on VET in Schools, a common approach to supporting transitions for remote and regional students into training or further education involves integrating the school and its programs with VET training in local industries. However, integrations must comply with national and state-level curriculum, and for good reason: these ensure that students have the transferable skills, aptitudes, and capabilities needed for rapidly changing economies, ecosystems and communities. Additionally, vocation training for local industries in schools must also consider industries in the wider local economy and how growth and change in the importance of both priority and peripheral local industries can impact on skill requirements.

Government support must be provided to ensure that the breadth of vocational pathways available to rural, regional and remote young people is as close to that available to their metropolitan peers as possible. The Halsey review into regional, rural and remote education confirmed that state governments had withdrawn TAFE delivery in the non-metropolitan regions of the nation. Despite the expectation that increased choice of providers would materialise in regional areas, the reality is that providers have retreated to the cities.[39] Where markets are thin, private, for profit providers usually either reduce services or increase costs to compensate for lower levels of demand and other costs associated with operating away from metropolitan areas. The only way to ensure that VET remains a viable pathway for non-metropolitan young people is for the role of public TAFE to be protected and enhanced. Ensuring that at least 70 per cent of public funding is available to public TAFE providers is an important first step; adequately funding TAFEs to operate in areas with diseconomies of scales and geographic isolation is equally important in promoting TAFE to non-metropolitan students as a pathway to employment or further education.

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[37] ACIL ALLEN CONSULTING, EVALUATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM, 2017, p. XVII
[38] *Ibid.*,p.xi.
[39] Zoellner, *Op. Cit, p.26*