INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION AND WORK

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LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1. Number Of Participants By Location 14
FIGURE 2. Types And Number Of ‘Partner Organisations’ – All Responses. 17
FIGURE 3. Types And Number Of ‘Partner Organisations’ – Responses To The Category ‘Ten Or More’ In Vic, Sa And Nsw 18
FIGURE 4. Types And Number Of ‘Partner Organisations’ – All Responses To The Category ‘Tafe’ 19
FIGURE 5. Types And Number Of ‘Partner Organisations’ – All Responses To The Category ‘Business’ 20
FIGURE 6. Students Involved In Applied Learning/Vet/Flo – All Responses 30
FIGURE 7. Groups Of Students Benefitting From Applied Learning/Vet/Flo – All Responses In Category ‘High Degree Of Benefit’ 31
FIGURE 8. Extent To Which Students Experience A High Degree Of Benefit From Participation In Applied Learning/Vet/Flo – All Responses 32
FIGURE 9. Ten Most Popular Programs – All Responses (N) 32
FIGURE 10. Extent To Which The Process Of Accessing Applied Learning/Vet/Flo Understood – All Responses 34
FIGURE 11. Highly Significant Attributes Needed To Implement Partnerships Effectively – All Responses 35
FIGURE 12. Highly Significant Attributes Needed To Maintain Partnerships – All Responses 36
FIGURE 13. Highly Significant Barriers To Effective Implementation Of Partnerships – All Responses 37

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. The Key Stakeholder Group And Data Collection Method 13
TABLE 2. Survey Participation By State And School Sector 13
TABLE 3. School Respondents’ Background Characteristics* 14
TABLE 4. Rubric Describing The Criteria And Types Of Applied Learning Partnerships 44
LIST OF ACRONYMS

NACCI  Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry
ACE    Adult and Community Education
AIG    Australian Industry Group
AQF    Australian Qualification Framework
ARC    Australian Research Council
ASQA   The Australian Skills Quality Authority
ATAR   Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
CI     Chief Investigator
FLO    Flexible Learning Options
HSC    Higher School Certificate
ICAN   Innovative Community Action Network
ITAB   Industry Skills Council
LLLEN  Local Learning and Employment Network
NSW    New South Wales
OECD   Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PP     Pathways Programs
RTO    Registered Training Organisation
SA     South Australia
SBAT   School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships
SES    Socio-Economic Status
TAFE   Technical and Further Education Institutes
TVET   TAFE Delivered Vocational Education and Training
UK     United Kingdom
VCAL   Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE    Victorian Certificate of Education
VET    Vocational Education and Training
VETIS  VET in Schools
VIC    Victoria
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In most modern OECD nations, secondary schools are required to form partnerships with a large variety of organisations, ranging from other education and training providers to community groups, businesses and associations. These schools typically manage a large number and various types of relationships with external organisations. These may include Work Placement Coordination providers, local businesses offering workplacements, external vocational education providers, such as Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Institutes in Australia, and other non-educational and community institutions.

This study was undertaken to evaluate the motivations underlying the formation of the partnerships, the positive outcomes these partnerships provide for students, and the difficulties they face.

The data presented in this report were collected as part of a project exploring the role that partnerships play in the senior secondary school curriculum in Australia. It included the school survey conducted in 2014. The survey targeted all secondary schools that provide applied learning and VET programs (State, Catholic and Independent) across the three states, from metropolitan, regional and rural locations.

This research also draws on over 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with school principals, teachers and program coordinators and 30 focus group meetings with 134 students conducted in 2015 in metropolitan and regional secondary schools located in VIC, SA and NSW. The interviews collected data on the background of the school and the type of VET programs offered, the motivation for providing applied learning programs, the resources involved, and the perceived challenges to the organisation and management of partnerships relating to VET provision.

KEY FINDINGS

The findings of this study confirm the changing nature of secondary school programs in recent years. Teaching and educational provision no longer remain exclusively linked to one institution, and new and innovative programs are being implemented to involve the wider community in learning and skills development. The most visible, and arguably the most important, of these innovations are the applied learning programs that have been introduced into all the senior certificates in Australia and which require the building of partnerships with various community actors. The perceived benefits for students deriving from these programs are clear to the students themselves, and to their teachers and the external partners. However, they are dependent on a number of factors. This study found that:

- Schools formed partnerships with a large variety of organisations, ranging from other education and training providers, government agencies and community groups, to businesses and associations.
- Almost 70% of respondents did not form any relationships with any professional associations of employers such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ACCI) or the Australian Industry Group (AIG).
- Partnerships with business comprise the largest category of schools’ partners overall.
- Schools are aware that industry exposure is an important objective of VET programs, but they faced challenges in organising work placements.
- Partnerships’ objectives corresponded with the level of disadvantage, the number of refugee or indigenous students and location.
- A very broad range of VET and applied learning programs were offered, and over 80 different programs were named by the respondents.
- VET offerings are driven mostly by student demand.
- Many students saw themselves as a “hands-on person” and did not see the general academic pathway as being suitable for them.
- Three top attributes that assisted teachers in partnerships were:
  - capacity to respond to individual needs,
  - broader understanding of ‘learning’,
  - networking with community.
- The motivated teachers (champions) as well as schools’ own networking played a highly significant role in initiating and maintaining partnerships.
• The greatest barriers for effective implementation of partnerships were:
  - limited financial resources,
  - limited human resources,
  - teachers being overloaded.
• Over 75% of school staff would like to further expand their applied/VET programs in the future.
• Some students considered the vocational pathway to be superior to the general curriculum pathway; they felt it to be “further ahead”.

REPORTED BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS UNDERTAKING APPLIED LEARNING PROGRAMS

• Partnerships for VET provision help to increase student engagement and retention.
• Students thought the applied learning pathway provided a better approach to learning.
• Structured work-placements enabled students to “get a head start”, get a taste for different industries and develop personally.
• Students enjoyed going on work-placements and most of them had a highly positive experience.
• Stakeholders involved in the partnerships agreed that partnerships with the local community helped develop “well rounded young people”, “lifelong learners” and “community citizens”.
• “Hands on” programs were seen to lead to stronger engagement with school.
• Partnerships for VET and applied programs helped ameliorate the effects of disadvantage.
• Collaborative partnerships linked curriculum and welfare and helped build students’ resilience.
• “Employability skills” such as working in a team, problem solving and communication were considered to be a top benefit for students of VET and applied learning programs.

The findings of this study have also contributed to the development of the criteria which may be used to categorise the type and level of complexity of partnerships supporting applied learning. We developed a rubric (see table 4) which will enable schools to map the status of their current partnerships and to advance their partnership from a simple partnership to a best practice innovative partnership.
1. BACKGROUND
BACKGROUND

This project was funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Training, NSW Department of Education and Communities, South Australia Department for Education and Child Development, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, Catholic Education Commission New South Wales, Catholic Education South Australia, Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales and Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, and was undertaken by the University of Melbourne and Deakin University.

1.1. AIMS OF THE PROJECT

This project investigated the co-existence of vocational, and applied, and general education programs in upper secondary school systems, with a particular focus on the practices of school personnel in the delivery of these programs, including their relationships with the partners that support these programs (DEECD 2010). These include the school systems to which they belong, partner providers (other schools, TAFE Institutes, private training providers), employers and community organisations.

The project investigated the demands of applied learning programs in upper secondary schools in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. It focused on the partnerships that schools form with employers and other organisations to support applied learning programs. It also examined the impact of these partnerships on the work of teachers, on the leadership of schools, and on the resources and school personnel capacities required to support them.

The main questions the study examined were:

- What is the nature of effective partnerships in supporting youth engagement in education and work in senior secondary school?
- What are the challenges and constraints and what are the enabling conditions for such partnerships?
- What does it take to implement a partnership at the school level (what does it require of the school? What stresses is it under: teacher time, training, costs)?
- What are the challenges and constraints at the school level?
- What are the enabling conditions for effective partnerships?

It sought to develop new knowledge about means of strengthening the delivery and outcomes of applied learning programs through a study of the organisational, resourcing and leadership factors that influence school personnel capacities and practices and the effectiveness of the multiagency linkages that support these programs.
1. BACKGROUND

INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION AND WORK

1.2. THE CONTEXT

Australian secondary schools are subject to numerous and complex demands, which include addressing skills shortages, increasing the participation and outcomes of equity groups and contributing to social cohesion, economic competitiveness, inclusion and well-being (Australian Government 2010; COAG 2009). These demands have led to innovations in curriculum and modes of delivery designed to engage the increasingly diverse range of young people in our schools. The most visible, and arguably the most important, of these innovations, are the applied learning programs that have been introduced into all the senior certificates in Australia. These programs have challenged schools to broaden their outlook, to form partnerships with other providers of education or training, and to interact with a diverse range of employers, community groups and government agencies in an unprecedented manner (Blake 2004; 2006; 2009; Starr & White 2009). While there is a substantial literature on the benefits of applied learning, there is little research on its professional and organisational demands within the school sector in Australia. The nature and effectiveness of the partnerships that support applied learning programs need further exploration to inform policy and practice.

Vocational and applied learning in schooling occupies a place within an educational and cultural hierarchy that is socially and institutionally biased. A century ago Durkheim (1904, in: Durkheim 2006: 313) affirmed “that secondary education has never had an essentially vocational goal”, while more recent scholars locate applied learning at the bottom of the status hierarchy of school subjects (Goodson 1983; Clarke & Winch 2003). Sustained and significant research conducted over a long period by Chief Investigators Polesel and Blake has highlighted the role of applied learning in democratising access to the curriculum, improving the learning experiences of all students and accommodating the broader range of learning needs which arose from the surge towards near-universal participation in secondary schools across OECD nations in the early 1990s. Studies by the CIs have presented evidence of the efficacy of applied learning in increasing school completion rates for low achievers and improving their transition into the labour market (Polesel et al. 2004; Polesel 2010; Blake 2007, 2009).

However, the CIs’ research has also identified significant challenges in delivering these programs. Research suggests that applied learning can be lacking in curriculum with ‘powerful knowledge’ which should ensure that practice is underpinned by theory (Wheelahan, 2012; Young and Muller, 2010; and Beck, 2013). These studies suggest that students should have access to critical knowledge for long-term success not only in general education programs but also applied and vocational learning programs. As Wheelahan (2012) argues, ‘powerful knowledge’ needs to be embedded in applied and vocational programs to break the cycle of disadvantage for young people. Furthermore, vocational and applied learning are typically delivered in multiple locations and through more complex relationships among students, teachers, external providers and employers. Yet the institutional emphasis in schools upon curricular and assessment regimes that produce a tertiary entrance rank militate against this multiplicity and variety. This means that some schools struggle to provide the leadership required to build capacity for the delivery of programs (Polesel 2008) and to form and conduct partnerships that are necessary for their effectiveness (Starr 2007). The present study extended the traditional locus of educational research, which is the school, deeply into the multiple sites of applied learning programs and the network of employers and agencies with which schools must interact to offer effective applied learning (Blake 2009, Starr & Blake: 2004; 2006; 2009).

Vocational and applied learning programs make demands upon school leaders for resources, teacher development and support, community relationships and educational leadership. They create demands upon teachers for changes in practice and relationships with students and external agencies. CI Blake (2009) has argued that programs such as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) require external collaboration to effectively implement applied learning in a school context, as do some of the other more ambitious and distinctive applied learning programs in senior secondary education in Australia – the South Australian Pathways Programs (PP), the mandatory work placements of the Industry Curriculum Framework subjects in the NSW HSC organised within the framework of Local Community Partnerships, and the Themed Industry Programs in Victoria. Because of the demands of these programs, their delivery depends upon the vision and quality of the school leadership, the capacity of other school personnel and the co-operation of multiple external actors.

An additional complexity in the case of Australia is created by the federal structure of the Australian education system (separate education systems in each state and territory with three broad sectors of provision: public, Catholic and independent). The federal system arrangements provide each state and territory with autonomy in the management of their school systems, allowing for a variety of ways to engage with external partners such as businesses which provide work placements.
For example, New South Wales represents an example of a highly coordinated and centralised approach to partnerships. What distinguishes New South Wales from other jurisdictions is its large network of Work Placement Service Providers (brokers) who coordinate mandatory work placements for vocational courses offered in the New South Wales senior school certificate, the Higher School Certificate (HSC). Effectively, this has removed some of the burden from school leaders for finding external partners. In Victoria and South Australia the responsibility for engaging stakeholders and managing the partnerships has remained the schools’ responsibility. The responsibility for actually finding a placement opportunity may vary from school to school, and also depends on the nature of the learning program.

The variety of approaches also creates definitional challenges relating to what ‘VET’ or ‘applied learning’ means, since each jurisdiction applies different definitions. For example, in NSW applied learning does not involve the delivery of VET (these are two separate programs). All VET delivery is restricted to Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) qualifications delivered by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), while in South Australia there is a more inclusive approach under the umbrella of ‘flexible learning’. The present study uses a broad definition of applied learning in schools, and includes all vocational programs that are offered by secondary schools (including VET, Flexible Learning Options (FLO) and School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs)) and which require engagement with external partners.

The challenge for researchers and practitioners, therefore, was to understand in what ways schools and external partners in Australia engage with each other to best serve the interests of secondary school students undertaking applied and vocational programs. This study aimed to bring to light the current state of these partnerships in Australian secondary schools from the perspective of school leaders, students and partners.

1 RTOs in Australia include schools, private training organisations and public training organisations (TAFEs)
1.2.1. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON PARTNERSHIPS

The importance of a local community and the local engagement of young people has been emphasised in many publications as a factor contributing to successful transitions.

The role of community organisations in enabling successful youth transitions has been growing in importance, as they remain embedded within the school community and also offer a variety of support services and volunteering experience. As Black (2008: 54) points out, the relationships between community organisations and schools are “the single most important cross-sectoral relationship in improving outcomes for children and young people”. Schools with high levels of parental and community involvement have better student results, higher attendance levels, and more positive student attitudes and behaviour (Principals Australia Institute, 2012; Henderson, 2011). As reports from Australia (Principals Australia Institute, 2012) and the US (Henderson, 2011) show, the status of school-community partnerships is growing but it needs to be established as a permanent component of a school environment.

Some partnerships are formed as a result of particular national policy needs, but many result from localised concerns, which include economic needs or skills shortages. The focus on secondary school and local community links serves as an important step in developing young people’s adaptability to local workforce requirements. Simmonds (2009) argues that such adaptability is critical for maintaining high levels of employment and opportunity. Furthermore, decentralisation that empowers local authorities is a necessary condition for devising solutions to tackle youth employment problems, as it leads to personalisation and localisation of service design, planning, and program delivery. Similarly, the OECD (2004) emphasises the role of local governance systems in improving the way policies are co-ordinated, adapted to local conditions and oriented in partnership with civil society and business.

Lasting partnerships require a coherent policy and established practices based on long lasting principles valued both by schools and by their community partners. Clemans, Billett & Seddon (2005) argue that successful social partnerships have to include a good connection and capacity building work, shared goals, governance and leadership, and trust and trustworthiness. These processes are complex and differentiated and they require support and guidance. To build successful family-school-community partnerships, the US-based National Education Association recommends actions at all governance levels (Henderson, 2011). The local level contributes through educators’ development and offering opportunities for schools to work with local professional agencies and also by identifying cultural ‘brokers’ in the community. At the school district level, it focuses on policies and resources which would support local level activities. At the state level, there is a need for developing policy proposals and making recommendations to policy-makers. The national level is responsible for school reform, and legislative and policy strategies.

In Australia, since 2002, Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) have been active in Victoria in connecting employers, education and training providers, government groups, agencies and individuals to build innovative programs for young people. This was an initiative funded by the Australian and Victorian Governments under the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions. It facilitates collaboration with stakeholders, undertakes local strategic planning, provides local advice on state-wide policy and program issues and serves as a platform for joining up government initiatives with local education and training systems. The focus has been on developing partnerships between schools, non-school providers and other agencies to promote more effective transitions.

The growth of partnerships between Australian schools, workplaces and community organisations has corresponded to a broad policy context across Australia’s federal, state and territory governments that seek to raise the Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rate to 90% by 2015 (Clemans, Billett & Seddon 2005; Davies 2012; PhillipsKPA 2010; Ryan, Brooks & Hooley 2004). This performance benchmark was established by the Council of Australian Governments and is specified as ‘the proportion of young people between ages 20-24 who have attained Year 12 or a Certificate II or above’ (Council of Australian Governments 2009, p. 14). It is a benchmark established through general acceptance in research that increasing young people’s participation in education and training has significant and long-term benefits for their employability, health, wellbeing and lifelong earnings (Access Economics 2005; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010; Keating & Lamb 2004; Lamb & Rice 2008; Lamb et al. 2004; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2007). Increasing education attainment rates to Year 12, or its equivalent, have therefore emerged as an important policy directive aimed at improving Australia’s social inclusion and increasing its economic performance (Australian Government 2010; MCEETYA 2008).

This policy context has influenced the need for education and training organisations to become innovative in creating and sustaining innovative
pathways for young people to engage in learning and to complete Year 12 or its equivalent. There is also a growing recognition in the education and training communities that, in order to support these policy directions, there is a greater need for effective partnerships with employers, workplaces and community organisations (PhillipsKPA 2010). Innovation has not been limited to conventional schools. Training organisations, employers and community organisations have become an integral part of the national effort to increase young people’s levels of attainment.

There has also been a national focus on ‘alternative’ programs being made available for young people who have become disengaged from conventional schooling. Although there are many examples of such programs and innovations represented in the research literature, there is a dearth of literature documenting the scope and detail of these innovations across Australia.

Holdsworth (2011) highlights the significant contribution made by programs such as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), the Innovative Community Action Networks (ICAN) in South Australia, and the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sectors. These programs were identified in the report as being a part of broader state-based initiatives which reflect the ‘mainstreaming’ of so-called ‘alternative education’ and which typically include a high degree of networking in their communication and partnership development.

Despite increased attainment of VET qualifications amongst 15-19 year olds, many authors raise significant questions about the efficacy of VET in Schools (VETiS) programs. Clarke’s (2012) study of VET programs in Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland reports significant variations in the way in which VET in Schools is incorporated into senior secondary school certificates, differences in the role of VET in schools, and the balance achieved between broader education and vocational training. This research also highlights the fact that industry groups are not convinced that vocational qualifications delivered in a school context equip young people adequately for the workforce, with insufficient high quality workplace learning being the main limitation.

Creative and innovative partnerships between schools, Registered Training Organisations and relevant workplaces have become an important feature of VETiS programs across Australia and abroad (Cooper, Benton & Sharp 2011; PhillipsKPA 2010) and several reports have argued that high quality partnerships have become essential to ensure effective program delivery, particularly in relation to the provision of structured workplace learning (National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2011; Polesel et al. 2004; Stokes, Stacey & Lake 2006). However, there is very limited research documenting what challenges are faced by these creative partnerships as they confront deficit thinking and the hegemony of the conventional academic curriculum, and how they compare with respect to the different jurisdictional requirements in which they operate.
1. THE METHODOLOGY
THE METHODOLOGY

2.1. THE PURPOSE

This study sought to focus upon the external linkages underpinning vocational and applied learning programs in schools in three Australian states: New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. It examined the ways in which these programs were managed and supported inside and outside the schools, with careful consideration of the very significant differences in delivery approaches between and within states. This research, for the first time, addressed knowledge gaps in the provision of applied learning programs at the upper secondary school level by examining the challenges and enabling factors in facilitating effective partnerships.

2.2. THE DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The project method was intended to increase our understanding of the nature of these applied learning programs and practices in order to maximise school capacity building and leadership, the quality of the collaborations and the nature of related policy and resource support. At the same time it attempted to maximise research training for the industry partners, school-level participants and the employers and providers with which they form these relationships. It investigated the characteristics and institutional framework for the programs as well as the characteristics of their students, and the experience of teachers, school leaders, students, employers and non-school providers involved in the programs. It provided a detailed examination of institutional and policy support, including costs and developmental and cooperative approaches that best support applied programs. The research approach employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

To achieve these aims, a combination of data collection methods was employed. The methods varied according to the type of key stakeholder group, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 The key stakeholder group and data collection method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>Data Collection Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Leadership</td>
<td>• On-line Survey (215)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interviews (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school students</td>
<td>• In focus groups (134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Partners</td>
<td>• Interviews (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUESTIONNAIRE TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The component of the data collection for this project was the school survey conducted in 2014. This survey was designed to investigate school leaders’ experiences and perceptions relating to approaches to applied learning, the institutional support for and barriers to these approaches, and the nature of partnership experiences, including the school leaders’ views on ways of improving the delivery and management of these programs. The survey targeted all secondary schools which provide applied learning and VET programs (state, Catholic and independent) across the three states, and was conducted online through Survey Monkey. Schools were selected and invited to participate via email contact from the industry partners (state, Catholic and independent school agencies), which used their contact data bases for this purpose. Of the 1137 schools invited to complete the survey, 215 comprehensively completed responses were received, resulting in a 19 percent response rate. The state and sector distribution is provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Survey participation by state and school sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction/Sector</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>215</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. THE METHODOLOGY

It is important to emphasise that the survey included responses from schools located in metropolitan, regional and rural settings. The majority of respondents were located in metropolitan areas, but the number of respondents from regional and rural locations was comparable in each state, as illustrated in Figure 1.

As can be seen in Table 3, the majority of respondents were VET coordinators (46%). The greatest share of respondents (55%) were working in schools for years 7-12 with only 10 respondents working in specialist (2%) or special schools (3%). Out of 215 respondents, 91 (43%) respondents were working in schools with a student population of 501-1000 students.

Table 3 School respondents’ background characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools Characteristics</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Proportion of sample (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positions held</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VET Coordinator</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Applied/Flexible Learning Coordinator</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Prep- Year 12</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 7-12</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 8-12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 9-12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 10-12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 11-12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specialist Secondary (e.g. sport and rec)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student population</td>
<td>More than 1000 students</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>501-1000 students</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>101-500 students</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100 or under</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*based on 170 responses given to Question 2 “What is your position at school?”
INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

The study also draws on over 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with school principals, teachers and program coordinators, conducted in Victoria, South Australia and NSW in 2015. The interview schedule collected data on the background of the school and the type of VET programs offered, the motivation for providing applied learning programs, the resources involved and the perceived challenges to the organisation and management of partnerships relating to VET provision. The interviews typically took between 50 and 60 minutes and were conducted in meeting rooms within the schools.

The study conducted 30 focus group meetings in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia with 134 students. The focus group meetings typically took between 50 and 60 minutes and were conducted in meeting rooms within the schools.

We also interviewed eight partners who cooperated with schools, including a private VET provider, a teacher from a private RTO, two youth workers, and four employers.

2.3. QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative analysis of focus group and interviews was undertaken for this report and judged according to the six themes developed in the form of a ‘thinking framework’ (see Appendix A). Each focus group and interview followed the same thematic pattern focusing on the following themes:

- **Background/Context** (e. school catchment area or students’ learning program)
- **The purpose of applied learning and the partnerships** (focusing on rationale and choice)
- **What is Involved** (resourcing, fees, administration requirements, types of partnerships, time-tableing)
- **Expected Outcomes** (objectives and effectiveness of partnerships, support, students’ career pathways)
- **Reality** (complexities of day-to-day management of applied learning and cooperation with partners, difficulties with program delivery or participation)
- **Limitations and Improvements** (pros and cons of partnering, plans and strategies for improving outcomes, resourcing limitations, costs, status of VET at school, challenges for students).
3. MAPPING THE PARTNERSHIPS
We combined the survey and interview responses to map out and categorise the partnerships formed by schools with external partners. These data provided answers to four main questions:

1. Who are the typical partners?
2. What is the role of these partners?
3. What types of applied learning programs are offered and why?
4. What are the resources needed to support these programs and partnerships?

The main features or findings related to these questions are highlighted in the following separate text boxes.

3.1. WHO ARE THE PARTNERS?

The large numbers of responses in our survey in every category of partnership (as shown in Figure 2) make it evident that schools form partnerships with a large variety of organisations, which range from other education and training providers, to community groups, to businesses and associations. This is confirmed by our interviews with school leaders, where the majority of respondents emphasised that schools had to manage a large number and various types of partners, including partnership brokers (the most popular in NSW), local business offering work placements, external providers like TAFEs, and other non-educational and community institutions.

Schools form partnerships with a large variety of organisations, ranging from other education and training providers, government organisations, and community groups, to businesses and associations.

Figure 2 Types and number of ‘partner organisations’ – all responses.
It is important to note that over half of the respondents (54%) did not have any partners representing not-for-profit organisations (such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence). It seems that school leadership did not recognise Work Placement Coordination providers as fitting the category of not-for-profit organisations, as almost all schools in NSW work with these providers which are NGOs. Three quarters of respondents did not have any partners from Industry Skills Councils. Almost 70% did not form any relationships with any professional associations of employers, such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry or Australian Industry Group.

Almost 70% of respondents did not form any relationships with any professional associations of employers

One of the school principals explained:

There’s quite a variation in the partnership arrangements that are needed. Some come under our Trade Training Centre auspices, some don’t. So there’s different consortium players in and amongst those different partnerships.

There were some State-to-State differences in the numbers of partnerships. In the category ‘ten or more’, business was dominant in NSW and Victoria. But it is clear that in Victoria and South Australia (see Figure 3) there was a broader range of partners engaged in this category with ‘local community organisation’ and ‘other schools’ at 15%, while in NSW about 7% of respondents cooperated with more than ten local community organisations and a ‘none’ response was given to the ‘other schools’ category (see Figure 3).

The largest number of partnerships formed with Private RTOs was in South Australia.

The three major partners identified by school leaders in terms of numbers involved were technical program providers, including TAFEs and private RTOs as well as business partners. Figure 4 illustrates the number of TAFE partners most commonly involved with each school. Very similar figures occur in the survey relating to the category ‘private RTO’
It appears that the most typical partnership arrangement (over 50% of responses) was for just one, two, or three TAFEs to be involved with one school. TAFEs usually had a purchasing arrangement for delivery away from the school site (53% of responses) while private RTOs had equal numbers (both about 30% of responses) of a purchasing arrangement and an auspicing arrangement. Figure 5 shows the number of business partners involved with schools. The importance allocated to the category of business partners is evident in the data. Almost one in three respondents claimed that they had ten or more partners representing business currently involved with their school. Partnerships with business comprise the largest category for schools overall, with the largest numbers of respondents reporting that they had ten or more partners of this kind and many more reporting that they had between one and nine partners which were businesses. In fact, other than private and public VET providers, which are heavily involved in the actual delivery of the training itself (including vocational courses and qualifications), business seemed to be the most important type of partner nominated by the schools in the study.

Over a third of the business partners were involved to provide access to workplace learning and almost a quarter provided opportunities for students to learn in community-oriented projects that aligned with the school’s objectives. However, the data also shows that almost a third of all respondents did not form any partnerships with business. These are mainly schools from metropolitan Melbourne and Sydney.

Partnerships with business comprise the largest category for schools partners overall
3. Mapping the Partnerships

3.1. Question 18 of the survey asked respondents to select significant factors influencing the formation of partnering arrangements. A large number of factors were identified as very significant. Access to a wider range of curriculum components (68%), specific expertise (67%) and cost effectiveness (66%) were the three factors most often selected.

3.2. What is the Role of These Partners?

It is also evident from the research data that partnership arrangements had been established for different purposes and in a variety of contexts. More specifically, the schools that participated in the research study had established partnerships that serve a very diverse range of students reflecting differences in location, socio-economic status (SES), the number of indigenous students and different school sectors. All these factors have influenced the rationale and shape of the partnership arrangements.

Our analysis of the research data suggests that there are four principal motivations in the formation of partnership arrangements in the senior secondary years of schooling. These motivations overlap and vary in importance in the different schools, but all are evident in one form or another in the majority of the schools that participated in this research project, irrespective of the jurisdiction or school sector.

These four types of rationales are listed below.

**Rationale Type 1: Delivering VET Programs**
The need for partnerships to support the delivery of VET programs through the provision of technical expertise and infrastructure. These partnerships include external education providers such as TAFEs, private training providers and Work Placement coordination providers.

**Rationale Type 2: Providing Structured Work-Placements**
The need for partnerships to support the provision of structured work place learning and work experience through the establishment of collaborative relationships with local industries.

**Rationale Type 3: Taking a Whole of Community Approach**
The need for partnerships with local community organisations to support the improvement of personal development skills related to the delivery of the VET program. These partnerships include local government providers or large community organisations such as the Red Cross.

**Rationale Type 4: Ensuring Access and Equity**
The need for partnerships to support equity initiatives for disadvantaged students or disengaged students (such as mentoring and support projects, usually with sporting clubs and non-governmental organisations such as Mission Australia, Beacon Foundation or the Centre for Multicultural Youth).
The following section explores each of these rationales and the ensuing partnership types. It provides a description of these diverse motivations and practices, as experienced not only by school representatives (principals, VET coordinators, teachers etc.) but also students and partners. The benefits reported by these research participants are also identified and discussed.

**RATIONALE TYPE 1: DELIVERING VET PROGRAMS**

Generally, all schools offering vocational studies of any type form partnerships to deliver VET programs and these partnerships are the most common. These partnerships play an important role in providing technical skills, technical expertise and infrastructure enabling students to achieve better educational and transition outcomes. Schools partner with technical education providers, such as TAFE institutes and private training providers in order to deliver the applied learning or vocational education programs. As might be expected, it is typically public (TAFE) and private training providers that are the most common types of partner for schools with VET programs. Even schools that were embedded in designated Trade Training Centres noted that external providers of vocational education were still required in some circumstances. One of the school principals explained:

"It’s a very, very large sourcing of organisations providing the training so at any one time I think we’re dealing with up to 12 to 15 RTOs for the classes and then all the ones for the school-based apprenticeships on top of that."

Where there was only one external provider, the local TAFE institutes were consistently found to be the only external provider, because of their offerings, infrastructure and location:

"Our major external one where the kids go to, or it’s probably the only one really, is South West TAFE. Students go onsite for that and usually the stuff that they do there are things that need either the expertise or the infrastructure to support it. Like in building and construction, plumbing and electrics and hairdressing and things like that."

"The local TAFE is our key partner there. I guess you could call it a partnership with the local TAFE, because they’re quite important to us."

"We only really have one partner in terms of delivery, which is our local TAFE. We are so lucky, we have wonderful relations with them and we do not tend to have a lot of problems or difficulties, because TAFE is 500m up the road. The kids walk. That’s why we offer a lot of courses."

Typically the TAFE institutes were used for external delivery:

"We have to use TAFE because there’s no other provider here. So if we don’t have instructors to deliver onsite, it really goes to TAFE. We’re on a cluster arrangement here, which means all the schools have a few students. So, their viability actually relies on all the other schools participating, which is always going to be an issue for us."

Some schools had a mix of different providers:

"Some of those we’re RTO for; some we’re not. So there’s quite a variation in the partnership arrangements that are needed. Some come under our Trade Training Centre auspice, some don’t. So there’s different consortium of players in and amongst those different partnerships."

"That’s one of the benefits of being an RTO and having control of our own delivery. But we do have some external delivery. We offer 22 different VETs. And probably about 5 of those would be off-site and the rest of them are delivered on-site."

Many schools with large student cohorts delivered programs on-site as RTOs and some used private RTOs for the delivery of courses on-site. This required schools to secure space, infrastructure, equipment and specialised teaching staff. Most of the Trade Training Centres within schools were shared with other providers, which added another layer of complexity:

"The VET provision is incredibly complex given the shared facilities and the trade training centre consortium and other schools actually using that facility, so that’s really, really tightly put together."

"At the moment anyone working in the VET area, especially if they’re in a lead school for a trade training centre, has got an enormous job on their hands. It’s very difficult work keeping all of the mix in play. Very difficult work."
3. MAPPING THE PARTNERSHIPS

RATIONALE TYPE 1: REPORTED BENEFITS

An analysis of interview data with all research participants suggests that these partnerships for VET provision are important as they enable schools to achieve their educational outcomes, in particular by increasing student engagement and retention in the senior years of schooling.

**Reported benefits: Partnerships for VET provision help to increase student engagement and retention**

Research participants suggested that schools built their capacity to respond to the diverse range of student and community needs and expectations by accessing the various services and courses available through other providers. This increased schools’ delivery capacity, and in turn enabled them to increase student engagement and retention through the provision of a broader curriculum offerings. The key features of this curriculum offering included students’ access to a broader range of VET and applied learning programs as well as their perceived access to future training and education pathway options.

The research data indicates that students in secondary schools across Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales had over 80 different programs to choose from, ranging from furniture making to financial services. Schools wanted to “give the guys options for what takes their fancy” (VET coordinator from Victoria). Consequently, the role of the school-provider partnership would be to deliver the courses corresponding with students’ choices.

The availability of a range of providers or course options clearly influenced students’ choices and future educational options. Some students emphasised that their course or subject choice provided a foundation for “more flexible future options” and did not “lock them in” a singular VET pathway:

- *I actually did primary industries because I actually think it will help me in the future that I actually want.*

- *I’m doing Certificate III in agriculture and I’m not going to follow that field but it will help on a resume for getting into something like Vet Science at uni. It contributes to that…*

The research data suggests that students also recognised the value of learning with different providers and the capacity for these programs to keep them in education longer. Students indicated that they chose the VET course because it was the best option available to them and it enabled them to cater for their interests, such as working with children or animals, or in construction or hospitality. Several students explained their choices:

- *I probably would’ve dropped out in Year 10 because I started VCAL in Year 10. That’s the only reason I stayed at school: to stay in that class.*

- *I wake up every morning and just be like ‘I feel I can’t wait to come to school because I know my class is going to be good.’*

Students considered the applied learning pathway to be appropriate for them because it provided a better approach to learning. In the words of one student, “(F)or a lot of people it’s the best way to learn”. It is considered to be an easier way to study.

- *The schoolwork we’re doing is easy. It’s not as complex or confusing as other subjects, like science.*

- *So I found that this would be easier to cope with that’s easier for me, I suppose. I understand it.*

- *It’s easier because it’s what we want to learn.*

**Reported benefits: Students thought the applied learning pathway provided a better approach to learning**

Applied learning was seen to provide a better balance between theoretical and practical learning, by enabling students to see and experience the practical application of theoretical thinking. They also preferred the external learning environment:

- *When they treat you as adults, you have got to grow up quicker. Otherwise you won’t work.*

- *Teachers at TAFE speak to you not as a student but as a worker.*
RATIONALE TYPE 2: PROVIDING STRUCTURED WORK-PLACEMENTS

Most schools in the study had also established partnerships with local businesses to provide their students with structured workplace learning opportunities. Structured workplace learning is on-the-job training during school enrolment where a student is expected to master a set of skills or competencies that may lead to an industry specific VET qualification or a senior secondary qualification (e.g. VCAL) that is recognised throughout Australia.

The research data indicates that local businesses were the largest non-educational partner to be involved with schools. The majority of industry partners were involved as work-placement providers for the compulsory structured work-placements. One of the school principals explained:

*The other big one is really with employers in order to be able to find the placements that we need. That’s almost an ever expanding pool I think because there’s significant need for placements and they happen in all sorts of interesting ways. Sometimes it’s students identifying their own; sometimes it’s us having a pool.*

The majority of schools created the databases of current employees or dealt with their industry brokers. Some schools established industry boards or industry coordinators:

*Our Industry Consultant who’s been here for a long time and I go out once a term and visit the employers. My challenge is to get some of this information in some data that we don’t currently have to be collected through different means, but he is a connection to lots of people within the area and knows it, so that’s a sort of a partnership that he helps us sustain.*

Only one of the interviewed schools had established a formal industry board at the school; it included school staff and the local industry representatives. The board assisted the school with planning and designing vocational courses and training.

*A formal industry board which turned out to be the greatest ‘God-send’ I think for the College in terms of strengthening the future (...) it’s great to have the industry to test that against to get feedback from.*

It seems that having business partners organised in a formalised way enables greater engagement into curriculum and course development, but also provides more industry exposure for young people through meetings, talks and presentations. On the other hand, the industry also benefits by having access to a pool of potential employees. However, the formal involvement of local businesses within the school structures was an exception, as the majority of schools relied on private contacts of parents and students.

*Schools are aware that industry exposure is an important objective of VET programs, but faced challenges in organising work-placements*
In sum, it is clear from the research data that the school leaders understood that vocational programs are closely linked to employment and post-schooling VET pathways and that providing these students with industry exposure within the VET pathway of their choice should be an important objective.

Nevertheless, schools acknowledged that partnerships with employers required constant attention:

You’ve got to keep your employers on board. That takes a lot of work. You’ve got to be so careful with them. You’ve got to nurture them. If you have too many kids dropping in, dropping out, the employer’s going “I’d really like to support you but I’m not there at the moment”. So you’ve really got to build that work-readiness up in the program and steadily put it out there for an independent sort of interaction by the student.

Another school representative added:

There’s a lot of weariness from employers from taking on countless numbers of weeks because an employee, a hospitality employer might have up to four or five placements through the year and then that rolls on every year…

**RATIONALE TYPE 2: REPORTED BENEFITS**

The research shows that structured work-placements enabled students to “get a head start”, get a taste for different industries, and develop personally. Employers were considered by research participants to be an important asset for the schools, supporting the development of a variety of skills and the attainment of employment outcomes.

**Reported benefits: Structured work-placements enabled students to “get a head start”, get a taste for different industries, and develop personally.**

Almost all school staff agreed that the students enjoyed going on work-placements. The focus groups with students also revealed a highly positive picture of their experiences. The students undertook their work-placements in a very diverse range of industries: music studios, trades, early learning centres, manufacturing, cafes, pharmacies, accounting firms, libraries, farms and building sites. The majority of students enjoyed their placements and some received job offers after completing their placements.

Students have recognised a wide range of benefits resulting from their work-placements including the chance to develop a variety of skills:

We do work across all environments, we work outside, inside, domestic, we do some commercial work and we do solar and data […] which is a very exciting thing because I’m getting a wide range of experience across all fields which will help me develop my career and become qualified, which is cool.

I do it with a Carpenter but he does more than just framing, he does more like a maintenance thing so he does a broad amount of things like roofing, plumbing, that sort of stuff, which is good. So I’ve had a variety of tasks that I’ve done, so it’s good I’m getting a lot of experience in a lot of things.

It seems that such work-placements were not only providing students with a ‘taste’ of industry but they also broadened their experiences beyond those evident in ‘training packages’.2

Through work-placements or school-based apprenticeship programs, students explored job options in particular occupations. They valued the opportunity to learn new skills and develop knowledge about workplaces. Furthermore, some students considered a vocational pathway to be superior to the general curriculum pathway because it: encourages them to work out what they want to do after they leave school; enables them to be employed full time when they leave school, providing them with income; and provides them with work experience and qualifications.

So, we’re leaving (school) … further ahead … with more experience.

We leave with the qualification. If they [VCE students] fail over there they’ve got nothing…

They’re about to leave school and they don’t know what workforce is going to be like! [referring to students in the general curriculum pathway]

Students also explained that working in the adult environment “made you grow up a lot quicker”, as you need to “behave like an adult when they treat you like an adult”.

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2 Training Packages are occupational skills standards against which training delivery and assessment of competency is delivered for a specific course.
Some students considered a vocational pathway to be superior to the general curriculum pathway; they felt it to be “further ahead”

A VET coordinator emphasised the importance not only of gaining experience in different workplaces through ‘taster’ programs but also of understanding that “the rules are different… expectation of dress is different, expectation of social norms and manners are different”.

One of the school principals explained the importance of ‘tasting’ the working environment:

To find out what it’s really like in the workforce and what it means to get up every day and do the things that you’ve got to do and find out ‘is this the career that I want?’… there’s a lot of different facets to the trades that the kids don’t necessarily understand.

Another added that workplace learning enabled students to learn about the values different workplaces represented:

Some workplaces want [to know] what their economic goals are which are fine business goals as opposed to what’s good for human beings. Some of our best workplaces have got a common set of values which actually are able to extract, when we do the studies, extract the best out of people… you might cop a bloody great mechanic that understands a bit about caring for people but there are other people that are [not].

The access to such diverse experiences with a supportive school environment was seen as a positive outcome for students. Some students reported that they were “better off” than university graduates:

People can go through four years of uni, get two weeks into their job and then realise they don’t like it and then there’s all that money and years wasted because they haven’t had experience in the field.

The industry representatives interviewed for the purpose of this study appreciated their own input into the professional and personal development of those young people:

You can mould them… those 16 years old they are not fixed yet on what they want, what they like… you can help them forming their ‘professional self’. We help then mould their ‘professional self’. They are young so it’s beneficial, as they are more open on learning from industry.

Confidence is the benefit. You look at those kids when they start with all the heads down and look at them at the end of Year 12, full of confidence, they are all set up. All matured. They know their own value.

A Building and Construction teacher gave an example of how the work-placement proved to be a positive experience for students:

I went out and visited all my students [on workplacements]. It’s amazing how many of my really bad students do really well on work placement. In fact, one of my worst students is a Year 12. The boss was actually going to offer him a job. He displayed such a good attitude on the job. It’s just the difference between some who can probably apply themselves in a real world situation but when they’re in a school situation, can’t see the value in it and can’t be bothered.

Students also felt more confident following each industry exposure:

You feel more confident as well; so the more you do it, the more confident you’re gonna get. Say each placement, it just gets a whole lot easier.
3. MAPPING THE PARTNERSHIPS

RATIONALE TYPE 3: TAKING A WHOLE COMMUNITY APPROACH

Many school leaders emphasised the importance of the involvement of local community organisations in schools, particularly within the VCAL program, where personal development skills are advanced through community projects. As the key goal of many of these partnerships is the development of “well rounded young people”, “lifelong learners”, and “community citizens” and partnerships with the local community, these partnerships were seen as effective in engaging young people in social issues.

There’s a lot of work done with the community and sometimes that’s a little bit dependent on the relationships that people have with community groups. So, for example, one of our VCAL teachers used to head up Student Council and so the connections that she has had with the community via the Student Council Connection actually, she translated that into the classroom work. Sometimes a lot of people are now contacting her as well because there’s that relationship that’s been formed. The Red Cross is probably a bit of a partnership there...we’ve done a lot of fundraising and so on with the Red Cross. They’ve been doing some work, with Timor Leste, which some of the kids have spoken about, so there’s connections there.

Reported benefits: Partnerships with local community helped to develop “well rounded young people”, “lifelong learners” and “community citizens”

One of the examples of a community partnership given was in organising a local surf festival:

This is an exemplar in vocational education and community partnerships. It has been in partnership for the last eight years. Over 120 students are involved every year. Students are involved in every aspect of the event from the catering, multimedia and marketing teams, judging area, photography, building the compound and administration. Student involvement includes hospitality, media, photography, construction and so on...Hospitality – Kitchen Operations students plan, prepare and cook all meals for the festival’s organisational crew and the corporate sponsors throughout the 14 days of the event. Hospitality – Food and Beverage students set up for catering functions, meet and greet officials, provide table service, deliver meals to officials and judges and communicate with the Kitchen Operations students on meal allocations and delivery. In 2013 one of our students was invited on the strength of his performances to work directly with Fuel TV. This involved him in live interviews streamed to over 2 million viewers.

RATIONALE TYPE 3: REPORTED BENEFITS

The research data suggests two key benefits: students’ personal development and students’ engagement with school.

Research participants identified a number of personal development benefits including: students’ increased self-esteem and sense of belonging; strengthened communication skills; and the building of students’ aspirations. These personal and social skills are an important element in increasing young people’s successful transitions from school to work or further study.

Reported benefits: Partnerships with the local community helped to increase students’ self-esteem and sense of belonging; strengthened communication skills and aspirations.
Students described their involvement with the local community as one of the positive outcomes of being involved with the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning. One of the students who was asked about the advantages of doing VET in schools explained:

*With VCAL we can just get out and do stuff, socialise more. We are also really involved with the community. We go over to the Aged Care Centre across the road. We’ve put on lunches and gone over there and talked to them for the day.*

Through their involvement in different community projects, students had an opportunity to help the elderly in aged care, the homeless, and people living in remote aboriginal communities:

*We went to Melbourne and helped out with the homeless people in Melbourne. Yeah. It’s through St. Vinnies.*

*We organized a camp, which is outside of Bourke on the Queensland New South Wales border. Well, it’s a remote Aboriginal community and we go up there and work with a Catholic primary school that doesn’t have a lot like we have here.*

*Our class project at the moment, we’re raising money to send stuff over in shipping containers to send to Timor Leste for underprivileged classes and stuff; instead of just writing about it, so we’ve been out doing events, fundraisers and stuff to try and get money to fund everything. We just recently went and bought a whole heap of stuff to ship over.*

Research participants considered the integration of such activities in the school program increased students’ understanding of cultural values and social diversity and deepened their knowledge of community issues and solutions.

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**Reported benefits:** “Hands on” programs are seen to lead to stronger engagement with school

The more active ‘hands on’ programs are seen to lead to stronger engagement with school, especially when the community partnerships result in innovative and creative endeavours. One of the Catholic schools in NSW developed a strong partnership with Google and a known marine activist by partnering on tackling local environment issues. As part of the project, students had to build an underwater robot, a robotic machine that would be operated from the inside of the biosphere. The robot operations were to be broadcast via ‘Google classroom’ across the world. The school principal saw many benefits for students:

*So we’ve got a model here that’s innovative enough where we’ve got them working on projects that are so different and interesting that it makes them want to go back and learn all the basic skills so they can be engaged in the big project.*

This partnership was perceived as successful because it engaged students with the metal engineering industry; it translated the progression from basic skills knowledge to innovation, and provided students with other important skills, such as networking and videoconferencing.
3. MAPPING THE PARTNERSHIPS

RATIONALE TYPE 4: ENSURING ACCESS AND EQUITY

Schools serve a very diverse range of students depending on their location, SES catchment area, number of indigenous students, and school sector. The schools located in highly disadvantaged communities with large enrolments of students from low-SES, refugee or indigenous backgrounds emphasised the importance of partnerships that helped reduce disadvantage and which were underpinned by specific values:

So there’s a lot in mentoring that should be done through Applied Learning... there’s a different set of codes that you can relate to and those codes help that young person define themselves in a way that in the school setting they couldn’t because they couldn’t crack the code.

When you go to workplaces you’ve got people so you’ve got to take scaffolds off for social resilience, for some kids you’ve got to go to a workplace where you’ve got a kind man that’s going to really mentor them.

Reported benefits: Partnerships for VET and applied programs helped ameliorate the effects of disadvantage

One of the VET coordinators interviewed for this study emphasised the importance of VET in terms of addressing and minimising the disadvantage the students bring with them:

We push towards VET and partnerships to solve the problems of our kids of low socio-economic status.

In some cases, some industry partners assumed the role of a mentor:

Well they got the Manager from Target up and she’s taken on three Koori kids, she doesn’t judge them, she nurses them, she scaffolds them, she understands a bit about them, she’s come from poverty herself, she gets the best out of them, she celebrates their success, she’s a beauty and she’s a Manager of Target. So that’s what we’ve got to really embrace I reckon, that institutions and organisations have got to have some sort of value and sense of altruistic purpose.

Another school with about 50 indigenous students partnered with the local industry broker, who was successful in getting additional funding for the placement program for indigenous kids. The school leadership emphasized that building links between curriculum and student welfare was part of their “obligation to engage and build resilience so these young people can be provided with broader perspectives.”

Schools responded to the needs of their most disadvantaged students by helping them to develop essential skills through the provision of educational opportunities made available through a wide variety of collaborative partnerships.
A lot of these kids get exposed to illegal activity. Some live on the street. The school is their only place of security and warmth and nurturing. On the brighter side it gives you a massive potential to do the most marvellous programs with the kids and the community. The potential is enormous.

One school located in a severely low socio-economic status area introduced an early VET commencement option, to enable younger students, who were unlikely to enrol in VET (14-15 years of age) to access vocational learning:

The earlier you get them understanding the system of work the better for these kids. We have a transition advisor, something that other schools do not have, and we have an engagement officer to make sure that it works for every single kid regardless.

One of the school principals also added that access and equity partnerships enable the school “to understand our students and what supports are out there”. Various sporting clubs were engaged with schools “to develop our refugee students, particularly our independent minors and independent refugees to build their connections within the school and outside the school” (School Principal from Victoria). Mentoring programs were developed in cooperation with sporting clubs to train students and connect them to their local culture:

For kids who don’t have parents, who may not have any family in Australia, they’ve got a link outside of school because typically our refugee kids come to school because this is a place where they belong…

**RATIONALE TYPE 4: REPORTED BENEFITS**

The research data suggest that through partnerships, schools are able to develop strong networks with community organisations to support equity initiatives for disadvantaged students or disengaged students.

**Reported benefits: Collaborative partnerships linked curriculum and welfare and helped build resilience**

For example, some schools engaged youth workers who worked across agencies to broaden the resource base for their educational delivery. One of the schools in South Australia organised school trips with youth workers, including visits in Aboriginal communities and rainforest walks. The students stayed in youth hostels to have access to different experiences:

…to meet other people of different nationalities which they found really interesting and the girls got to cook together and work in a big kitchen and just have people around them, I just felt that they got more benefit and more life skills from that than staying in a Cabin or staying in a Hotel.

Some students reflected on how the program affected their social skills:

It’s given me a lot more social skills and able to be more open with the public and stuff. Be able to talk instead of just (sitting) quietly away in the corner. I think when I first came here I was that shy that I couldn’t speak to anyone but with the activities that they did during the year, it has brought out some of that confidence. I can be around…I can go inside a class and be myself instead of being that shy little girl in the corner.

I found the program is helping me to gain more confidence. Like I used to never talk to anyone but…I used to stick to the people I know but now because of the VCAL program, it’s helped me gain more confidence to talk to others.

Research participants considered these partnerships as important because they build schools’ capacity to develop critical relationships between students, their families and local community organisations that are necessary for personal, academic and vocational development. Indeed, these examples are consistent with the idea of ‘linking social capital’ (World Bank 2000) where vertical ties are built between the disadvantaged in the community and those with influence. These are important links as they strengthen social capital and may be leveraged to get a better job or better opportunities.
3. MAPPING THE PARTNERSHIPS

3.2.1 SCHOOL CONTEXTS

As shown above, there was a large variety of partners involved in schools, but the partnerships played different roles depending on the school context and approach to applied learning.

Figure 6 illustrates the main trends in the take-up of each program type across the three jurisdictions. At schools where a small number of students were enrolled in applied learning/VET programs, a mix of different options was offered for small groups of students in all categories of programs. In relation to VET, a clear trend is shown, with VET being dominant where large number of students were involved, with over 70% of respondents from the category ‘more than 50’ selecting VET as the most popular option. The opposite trend is visible for FLO, which decreases with the larger groups of student population at school.

From the interviews with schools, we see that schools serve a very diverse range of students depending on their location, SES catchment area, number of indigenous students, and school sector.

I reckon that those kids you interviewed yesterday 70% are in a semi-poverty to poverty sort of area. So you haven’t got many families there that would own a house, have been in regular jobs, like don’t pay their fees.

We essentially take anybody. So at the first level we enrol anybody; we don’t say ‘no, you’re not welcome here’. It’s part of our responsibility and we’re quite proud of the fact that we try to cater for and accommodate all students.

One of the school principals explained that there was an increasing number of applied learners in the government system as a result of ‘residualisation’ (the government schooling sector is the residual sector that takes students who are not enrolling in independent and Catholic schools, see: Lamb (2007)) and an increase in the compulsory school age:

I think within our sector, there’s some residualisation going on...in government schools...in the last probably 3-5 years a lot more middle class families are making a decision to send their kids into the independent and Catholic sector...and then allied with that we’ve had a change in the leaving age for kids. Those couple of things have resulted, I reckon, in a change of our clientele and probably more kids that are well suited to the VCAL program rather than the VCE program.

The needs of the students with special needs and from disadvantaged backgrounds also impacted on schools’ philosophy and resources:

Well we’ve got a fairly high refugee population and within that group we also have a number of students who are refugee minors or refugees who were refugee minors who are now independent, so they don’t have any extended networks beyond the school. We also have Koori students here, at the moment we’ve got about seventeen and they have quite distinct needs that are often different from the rest of the population.

Partnerships’ objectives corresponded with the level of disadvantage, number of refugee or indigenous students and location

Figure 6 Students involved in applied learning/VET/FLO – all responses
As can be seen in Figure 8, the highest benefits resulting from involvement in applied learning/VET/flexible learning options programs were 'employability skills' such as working in a team, problem solving and communication, with over 80% of respondents selecting this benefit.

“Employability skills” such as working in a team, problem solving and communication were considered to be a top benefit for students of VET and applied learning programs

Responses indicating ‘increased confidence’ (over 70% of responses) and ‘improved understanding of career pathways’ (69%), ‘increased likelihood of completing Year 12’ (67%) and ‘increased engagement in learning’ (66%) rated highly.

The rural or regional location also influenced the context of educational provision:

Very rural, so majority of students are bussed in from rural kind of areas. It’s a big catchment area. Between 950 and 1,000 enrolment - it was funded under the low socio-economic status [funding program].

To understand the rationale and philosophy of the VET offered in the schools, the survey also asked respondents to identify the type of student benefitting the most from these programs. The three types with the highest level of benefit were: (1) students seeking pathways to employment upon leaving school; (2) students seeking training pathways through a TAFE or VET provider upon leaving school; and (3) students seeking an apprenticeship (see Figure 7 above). It is clear from these responses that the school leaders understood that vocational programs are closely linked to employment and the post-schooling VET pathway and that providing students with industry exposure within the VET pathway of their choice should be an important objective.

Figure 7 Groups of students benefitting from applied learning/VET/FLO – all responses in category ‘high degree of benefit’
3. MAPPING THE PARTNERSHIPS

These benefits were a result of involvement in practical and hands-on activities (85%), flexible approach to learning (81%) and the opportunity to learn in workplace and community settings (79%). These three aspects were identified by the majority of respondents answering question 13 of the survey: What aspects of the applied learning/VET/flexible learning do you think facilitate the most benefit for students’ learning and engagement?

3.3. WHAT PROGRAMS ARE OFFERED AND WHY?

The responses from schools indicated that a very broad range of VET and applied learning programs were offered, with over 80 different programs being named by the respondents, including plumbing, public safety, justice, and cabinet-making. Figure 9 shows the ten most popular courses offered, with Hospitality, Building and Construction and Engineering being among the most popular in all three jurisdictions.

A very broad range of VET and applied learning programs were offered, with over 80 different programs named by the respondents.

Figure 8 Extent to which students experience a high degree of benefit from participation in applied learning/VET/FLO – all responses

Figure 9 Ten most popular programs – all responses (N)
From the optional qualitative answers (N=205) given regarding the question on the selection and number of VET programs offered, many responses were similar in suggesting that their objective was to provide “any VETIs course that students would like to attend at any TAFE” and that their “offer varied from year to year, based on student need or interest”.

One of the VET coordinators interviewed for this project explained that students and parents were important in influencing the school’s offerings:

The students now are pretty savvy. They want the best package for themselves… the major players are the students. They want variety. They want to experience what is on offer, because their mates at other schools are experiencing that… parents these days are shopping around.

Some qualifications were thought to be more desirable, for example hospitality:

It’s also driven by student interest and student employment in the areas. So from my understanding of why students choose hospitality, it’s not an area they want to go into but they want a Certificate II because when they go to uni they don’t want to just be working at Coles or Woolworths, they want to work in a restaurant, it sees them around the country, they can take it with them. They travel with the certificate and it’s also recognisable, apparently I’ve been told, in the UK.

Students’ choices were driving the offerings but competition between the schools for students was another factor:

A lot of schools in the region are offering lots of VET certificates. So as a pathway, if we’re not keeping up with the rest of the schools, we’re disadvantaging our students. Some of our students might have left the college because they’ve looked around and thought, “This college, five minutes from my home is offering these certificates, this college is not”.

An analysis of the focus group interview data has identified several factors influencing students’ choice of applied learning or VET pathway. Many students expressed concerns about the demands of the general education pathway. The work was considered to be too hard, as it was overly theoretical, textbook focused and paper based.

‘Cause I think the pressures of the other school were too much and this is just a better option. You get more experience from it.

Probably ‘cause it’s more even with practical and theory. It’s not all theory based which makes it really stressful. When there’s even balance, I reckon it’s easier, because it’s not all focused on one thing.

Furthermore, students considered that assessment, which focuses on examinations, assignments and essay writing, was a barrier to their participation in the academic curriculum. They reported that the heavy workload and homework requirement made it difficult for them to work part-time and to have a life outside of the school.

I chose this because I never really enjoyed studying as much. I never used to be really good at school before VCAL, so I found that this would be easier for me to cope with.

A dominant theme emerging from students’ responses was the benefits of the applied approach to learning. Students considered the applied learning pathway to be appropriate for them because it provided a better approach to learning. Many students also saw themselves as “a hands-on person”.

Many students saw themselves as a “hands-on person” and did not see the general academic pathway as being suitable for them.

The students’ perception of themselves as learners also influenced their decision to select applied learning subjects. Some of the students suggested that as they were “bad learners” and “not good at school”, they would not pursue the university pathway.

Well I’ve never been like the type to sit down and do essays and all that, so I sort of knew from the start. I’ve always been a hands-on person, I like being outside, social, so I just thought VCAL was the right opportunity.

VET offerings are driven mostly by student demand
Consequently, without alternatives, the goal for some of these students was to “get out” or leave school and find work.

Students indicated that they chose the applied learning pathway because it was the best option available to them. There are indications that students made the decision to do applied learning as early as year 7. The applied learning pathway allows them to pursue learning that is relevant to their interests and to life and living. Students suggested that the applied learning pathway enabled them to apply their learning in their everyday life, for example in providing employability skills.

The positive response to the applied learning approach was captured well by one student’s observation that “guided learning” was superior to “just being taught”. Some students suggested that they should have access to applied learning courses, including an increased number of work placements, at an earlier stage.

Students’ acknowledgement of the strengths of the pedagogy underpinning applied learning reflects the success of the use of applied learning approaches as a student engagement strategy. This strategy provides students who are unable to identify with the general school curriculum, with an alternative way to learn through experiential, hands-on, active learning and work-based learning approaches. However, students’ responses support the case made by Blake et al (2007) for re-conceptualising learning in secondary education to incorporate a broader diversity of approaches to learning.

A final issue to emerge related to the ways in which program offerings were selected, both by schools and by students. To begin, it was noted that the choice of programs was often heavily dependent on what was available locally, both in terms of program choice and employer options:

In the context of Australia... there is a huge, vast land and the access to vocational education programs is sometimes limited, especially when you’re far away from TAFEs and you don’t have that same choice....

The other contingency is that we need to negotiate with all the schools in the area because there is a limitation of employers to provide acceptable work placement....

3.4. VET PROVISION AND RESOURCES

The survey asked several questions about the processes within the schools regarding the provision of applied learning and VET programs. Question 10 asked to what extent the process of accessing these programs was understood, and the majority of schools (86%) agreed that it was ‘very well’ or ‘mostly’ understood (see Figure 10).

Figure 10 Extent to which the process of accessing applied learning/VET/FLO understood – all responses

Over 100 respondents also added additional comments on the understanding of these programs in their schools. Some comments were very positive:

The organisation has a good understanding of VET. We have fantastic support from the Executive and RTO coordinator. General staff have a good understanding of the benefits of VET for many students.

The College RTO is very supportive and well informed and holds regular meetings with each school in the diocese. Information is well distributed through the school at Information Evenings and through targeted student counselling – one-on-one sessions with parents present. However, due to the cost of TVET programs – we do not advertise these courses/programs widely. SBAT programs are advertised through Years 8, 9, 10, 11 and use the resources available through State Training Services and the web.
Some respondents commented on more negative experiences:

**VET options are viewed by many staff and parents as somewhere to hide the dummies. Seen as the poor sister of going directly to uni.**

**Most know the ATAR path, but have limited information concerning other pathways.**

**A specialist counsellor deals with these programs. Generally, staff have a limited knowledge about options.**

The survey also enquired about the skills sets required of teachers to implement partnerships effectively. Figure 11 shows the three attributes which assisted teachers with partnerships and which were regarded as highly significant by the majority of respondents: capacity of teachers to use applied learning to respond to individual learning needs; a broader conception of learning; and capacities in networking and community partnerships.

**Three top attributes which assisted teachers in partnerships:**

1. **capacity to use applied learning to respond to individual needs**
2. **a broader understanding of ‘learning’**
3. **networking with community**

Question 20 of the survey asked the respondents to indicate to what extent some organisations/networks played an initiating role in establishing partnerships. The biggest player in initiating partnerships was schools themselves, with almost 65% of school representatives claiming that their school’s own networking played the most significant role.

*The motivated teacher (champion) as well as school’s own networking played a highly significant role in initiating and maintaining partnerships*
The survey also asked about the role of selected networks or people in maintaining the partnerships (Figure 12). The three top answers again pointed to schools’ own resources in maintaining these partnerships. Over half of the respondents said that a motivated teacher in the school (champion) as well as the school’s own networking played a highly significant role. The role of a school champion was a significant factor for sustained success in the schools we visited. This is consistent with the vision of Hedley Beare in his work – *How we envisage schooling in the 21st Century* (2006). He believed that an innovative school was able to create a network of relationships through a significant role of “the Prime Mover”.

The majority of respondents pointed out that professional associations of employers, Industry Skills Councils and the Applied Learning Teacher Association had no role in initiating and maintaining partnerships.

When asked (Figure 13) about the barriers to the effective implementation of partnerships, almost three-quarters of respondents agreed that limited financial resources and limited human resources were the two most significant factors.

Additionally, over half of the respondents added that teachers were overloaded.

**The greatest barriers for effective implementation of partnerships are:**

*limited financial resources, limited human resources, and teachers being overloaded.*
It is clear from these responses that schools have a leading role in forming and upholding the partnerships, but they feel themselves to be under huge financial and management pressure. Some selected comments provided by the school respondents confirm that:

The ever increasing paperwork and yearly audits make it considerably difficult for teachers to form these partnerships / relationships. We are allocated very little funding and cannot afford the time to make these connections.

VET in schools is out of control with the paperwork which is expected to be completed by a teacher. Comparing it to an HSC subject - VET is ridiculous.

Time constraints, teaching staff belief that learning takes place in the classroom, therefore are reluctant to release students when opportunities outside school arise through partnerships, e.g. try-a-trade days, work skills, work experience, work placement.

I find the biggest barrier is the assessment and reporting of competencies. The forms of assessment and triangulation of assessment in an educational setting restrict the time of staff. The cost of TVET courses is a barrier. Very expensive for Catholic schools.

Over three quarters of respondents would like to further expand their applied/VET programs in the future. Some selected comments from the survey included:

*We would like to offer more VET courses at our school. We need to both find appropriate teachers to train and continue to spend money on appropriate facilities.*

*Would like to offer more subjects at school through more RTOs that have industry connections; would like to expand on more community partnerships that are more connected to industries that interest students.*

*More programs for students at risk of disengagement at years 9 -10.*

*VET options are still limited, mostly the same traditional ones as always and currently the offerings are diminishing due to Skills for All; not every student wants to participate in this scheme, if they don’t there are not many options for them that are cost effective alternatives.*
3.5. QUALITY OF VET PROVISION

Some students expressed concerns regarding the quality of vocational programs delivered by external partners. A range of factors was mentioned affecting the quality of their learning experiences, for example, the quality of teaching:

We’re re-learning everything that we already learnt last year because the teacher didn’t keep track of what we learnt. So we’re not learning anything new. We’re just re-learning …

They don’t seem to give you enough work on the actual course. It seems like they don’t know what they’re doing.

TAFE has been a bit of a mixed bag.

Some school representatives identified several key concerns (such as the frequent staff turnover, the unpredictability of funding and communication between partners) as hindrances to the effectiveness of VET delivery.

My biggest problem [is] with the external providers, I can’t keep track of what the students are learning until the end of the year. I think quality has been very poor.

Many schools suggested that VET delivery was expensive and the quality depended on funding levels:

It’s definitely more resource intensive and I think it’s that the quality has been sacrificed by taking the funding out of that because to do it well you actually do need to have smaller class sizes, you need to develop the relationships much more in a VCAL class than you do in a VCE class.

Nevertheless, one of the RTO representatives explained that there were some high quality Trade Training Centres at schools which, combined with specialised teaching staff, provided real practical quality skills:

The integrity of the program and the real outcomes that are achievable and then taken to an employer and saying, “This is what I have produced” - these employers are looking at it and saying, “wow”. In fact it will push them to the front of the queue, and that is what we want, we want to be able to offer industry quality personnel coming through.

Employers also commented that through having closer links with schools they were able to monitor the level of training delivered at school and ensure that quality continued on the work-placement:

We can monitor their training through workplacements and check their quality. We know what they’ve learnt when they come from this school, while when those who finish a nursing degree at uni they have no idea about industry and how to dispense medication.

3.6. HOW VET AND APPLIED LEARNING PROGRAMS FIT IN SCHOOLS

There were several comments made during the interviews with school leaders related to the dominance of traditional school structures and the “fit” of the VET programs within these structures. One of the school principals from NSW explained:

I think that’s one of the biggest challenges that there’s been a lack of recognition of how this impacts on a school structure and they no longer apply and that’s the problem. And so what you have is teachers who are involved in VET and a school has to try and swell structures to meet the needs without the actual structures changing. There’s four VET teachers, they are serving two masters. It’s the Board of Studies in New South Wales, it’s the Board of Studies in terms of HSC requirements and all of those sorts of things, as well as ASQA and what it’s requiring.

There was a suggestion that schools need to re-structure to accommodate the VET provision for it to be effective. The large administrative role, timetabling issues and budgetary consequences were among the challenges remaining. Some schools were still trying to comprehend how the two ‘systems’ co-existed:

Schools are very structured places, very, very structured. I’m talking about all the VET, about how the rigid structure in the school doesn’t really work with it.

Similarly, the place of alternative programs within the schools in South Australia has also been a talking point:

… alternative programs often lack structure and I think often it’s because you think ‘well it didn’t work well with the structure within the school so therefore you can’t have a two-structured program’, whereas in actual fact having that structure is really important because if you don’t have it then the disengagement happens more readily.

Nevertheless, it seems that the majority of schools have moved VET and applied learning programs from the margins to become a key component of modern comprehensive senior secondary education. However, it has required an increased number of human and financial resources.
3.7. LEADERSHIP

Throughout the stages of this research, several important points were made about educational leadership as it pertained to the provision of VET, applied and flexible learning at national, state-wide and school levels.

National leadership

First there were comments referring to the sector in general at national and state-wide levels – issues that extend beyond the school level. High amongst these were topics receiving national media attention, especially concerns about the deleterious effects of progressive deregulation in the VET sector, notably the introduction of ‘contestability’ (field notes, 14 June 2013; 9 October 2014; 25 November 2015). Contestability was intended to open the training market to private investment to increase available providers and raise course quality and create pricing competition. As a result, over 5000 Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) now operate across the nation (Hetherington & Rust 2013).

RTOs are reported to be “providers of quality-assured and nationally recognised training and qualifications” by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), but interviewees suggested their quality varies considerably. Adding to concerns were media reports highlighting disreputable practices occurring across the sector, including insolvent trading and enrolment practices that prey on vulnerable students through misleading claims and enticing inducements. There were concerns that some ‘for-profit’ RTOs were not reliable and may not be long-term players in the market. Furthermore, employers are expressing a loss of faith in the quality of Australia’s training qualifications due to the instability of providers, the varying quality of training courses, and graduates’ lack of skill proficiency and work-readiness (see for example, Hetherington & Rust 2013; The Senate Education and Employment References Committee 2014; Trounson 2013).

An unintended consequence of deregulation has been massive funding ‘blowouts’ as the VET market was unleashed to market forces (Hetherington & Rust 2013). This has resulted in drastic annual funding reductions that have been born largely by the public TAFE sector. The impact on TAFEs has been significant, with institutional closures, course cutbacks and reductions in staffing numbers – with regional and rural TAFEs being the most severely affected. Research respondents were concerned about the corollary impact on services available to schools. Further, media reports that question the sector’s reputation for quality and reliability, similarly produces problems for VET, applied and flexible learning provisions in schools.

Interviewees believed that national responses were required, including a stable system of human capital investment in VET and applied and flexible learning for schools. Sentiments included the need for more trainees for a sustainable supply of vocational skills, with a special injection of funding required for areas of current skills shortages. Further, the strong view was that VET funding needs to be committed for the longer term. Short-term funding is seen to present longer-term social and economic problems for the country, including insecurity and unsustainability for education authorities, employers and students.

A second theme that emerged concerned the need for national VET, applied and flexible learning reforms at senior secondary level and for consistency across the states. There is a desire for students to remain in education or training until they move to employment, so the idea of having national targets for student participation was supported, because ‘what is measured matters’ (field notes, 14 June 2013). Government priorities with outcomes targets were seen to be those most adequately funded, while ensuring accredited outcomes for all students was seen as a national necessity. There was strong agreement that classroom VET programs achieve AQF Certificate III level to enable greater articulation into post-school pathways.

Respondents saw problems in the National Curriculum, as it currently does not recognise applied and flexible learning pathways. There were also calls for nationally agreed definitions and understandings in VET, applied and flexible learning – currently there are differences in how federal and state governments define a ‘young person’, with state definitions usually referring to 16 – 19 year olds, while the federal definition of students ‘under 18’ serves to limit where funds can be directed. One focus group said that 95% of students in their state’s programs are aged between 16 and 21.

Teacher training and professional learning in VET and applied learning was seen as a further area requiring urgent national attention. For example, one school principal argued that ongoing professional learning was essential and urgently needed, or programs would be hampered:

Teachers require industry experience to understand the requirements of vocational learning that is quite different to traditional classroom programs… Staff also need to have ongoing training and exposure to industry to ensure they are aware of industry standards and changes in contemporary [vocational] education techniques. (Victorian school principal)
Lastly, there were concerns about a systemic lack of responsiveness during times of shifting economic needs. For example, one focus group suggested that during an economic downturn VET, applied and flexible learning funding should increase, yet often funding decreases during these times. Others were concerned that governments are well aware of areas of skills shortages, but appear more likely to fill these via short-term, 457 migration employment schemes rather than longer term, ongoing local training schemes.

**State-wide leadership**

At the state level, concerns involved funding models, the role of educators employed at central, district or school levels, and levels of visibility of VET, applied and flexible learning programs. In each state there are personnel with state-wide responsibilities for curriculum, accreditation and funding allocations, oversight for establishing preferred providers for case management, the allocation of community grants funding (if funds are available), and the collation of state-wide accredited learning data. Staff in regional or district roles have a focus on the development of community partnerships and provide more direct support for schools.

Interviewees employed within central education authorities were concerned about the stability of government funding for VET, flexible and applied learning programs. Limited-term funding, funding cutbacks and shortfalls were seen to impede the goals of raising student retention levels at senior secondary level, for all students to acquire accredited outcomes, building national ‘human capital’ and raising productivity (Productivity Commission 2012). Funding arrangements influence levels of staffing and other support for VET, applied and flexible learning programs in schools. While funding for students has applied irrespective of changing governments, many support services are funded for a limited time only, with a concomitant impact on schools. For example, one interview respondent said:

> … the funding hasn’t really changed due to government changes, however our unit funding - the money to fund the networking and coordination of the strategy - has been on a year-to-year basis and we’re currently waiting to hear whether our funding is either ongoing or guaranteed for three years moving ahead... I’ve actually just come off a phone call about my ongoing tenure and what the option is and what my choices are. It has been difficult for everyone in our unit for the last four years... we’ve lost a lot of good staff due to the unknown around the ongoing viability of the roles.

Others said:

> … for the past nine years we’ve had Federal funding that’s been administered through (a state government department)... and we’ve been advised that that ceases at the end of this year.

> I think we’re always vulnerable to funding issues, different people take leadership positions that have different biases towards programs, ideas, strategies...

> … running on the smell of an oily rag is absolutely the norm in [our] world.

**School leadership**

Interviewees believed that engaged and supportive school leadership, appropriate student learning experiences and achievements, and quality teaching and learning are at the basis of successful VET, applied and flexible learning programs in schools. Many comments suggested that the success or otherwise of school programs depends heavily on the attitude of the incumbent school principal. For example, this comment places school principals in a list of ‘ingredients’ for a successful program:

> … there are varieties of levels of schools’ capacity to cater for a variety of students and that can be dependent on many things... the students themselves and what community brings, resourcing available, knowledge of skills and... the local decision making of the Principal.

Depending on the support of the school principal, VET, applied and flexible learning options can be perceived as an integral component of the school’s offerings, or “as peripheral to what the school does” (survey comment, August 2014). The influence of the principal was seen to be particularly noticeable when school leaders or leadership teams change, showing immediate improvements when a new leadership team foregrounds the importance of multiple pathways to ensure the success of every student and downturns when they do not. For example, one group of teachers saw immediate results with the appointment of a newly appointed supportive principal and assistant principals:

> We have just recently had a change in the school’s leadership. The new leadership team have a vision to work harder to develop community partners and networks to improve opportunities for our school and students... A small minority can sometimes think it [VET] is for the less academic students, but [new leaders] are changing that view. (South Australian teacher)
Principals are viewed as program “drivers”, “strong supporters”, “allies in our goal to achieve the best outcomes for all students” and as valuable in “securing partnerships”. Programs benefited when principals are active in program communications, promotion and visibility, and when they demonstrate personal interest, knowledge and involvement in programs. Successful programs also rely on dedicated, stable and committed staffing to ensure suitable timetabling, partnership development, program monitoring and reporting, authentic learning and engagement, with attention paid to student attendance, welfare and satisfaction – with principals being seen as instrumental in all these areas.

The importance of the role of the principal and leadership in providing support and direction/vision for applied learning programs.

Interview and questionnaire data indicated concerns when there was “little support [from leadership] to be released from class to liaise and supervise”, when timetabling created “difficulties and coordination time was not provided”, when “there [were] no funds for professional development”, when school leaders had “little awareness of the program and its partnerships” and when program logistics were problematic. Indicative comments included:

Time constraints are overwhelmingly a problem for teachers of VET subjects. Professional development is also pertinent - teachers need to be more informed. (Victorian teacher)

There is a lack of transport and liaison time. Teacher burnout and timetabling [are serious issues]. (Victorian teacher)

There were concerns when school leaders were more focused on the traditional academic program. Where school leaders were not seen to be providing sufficient support for VET, applied and flexible learning options, teachers complained about insufficient time allocation, too few dedicated resources, insufficient school knowledge and support, and ineffective policies or procedures to properly implement non-traditional learning provision.

The education department representatives were most concerned about the influence of school leadership when funding goes directly to schools instead of being administered centrally. (Project officers suggested that school principals were often tempted to use funding to buy in more teachers across the school rather than use them for their intended purposes).

The education department representatives saw the importance of ensuring informed and supportive school leadership. For example, one said:

I see that my role is to educate not just the VET coordinator careers counsellor pathways person… but also to educate the leadership and principal. So whatever we give the VET coordinator, we also try and make sure that there’s leadership involved in that so that there is a team approach to VET in the school; it’s not just one person trying to battle their way through and implement programs that aren’t going to be taken up or viewed positively.

The school principals interviewed demonstrated overwhelming admiration for teachers, VET, applied and flexible learning pathways, the calibre of partnerships and the outcomes achieved for students. They were concerned, however, with issues concerning program costs (funds are viewed as “always insufficient”), duty-of-care responsibilities when students are learning off-site, transportation, timetabling, professional learning opportunities, and finding and retaining suitable staff (with high staff turnover and teacher ‘burnout’ being major problems in some schools).

The importance of dedicated staff to ensure that partnership development, welfare, monitoring and authentic learning etc. are maintained.
4. FINDINGS - WHAT MAKES INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP?
This study has focused on the partnerships which schools form with employers and other organisations to support applied learning programs. It also examined the impact of these partnerships on the work of teachers, on the leadership of schools and on the resources and school personnel capacities required to support them. The findings of this study have also contributed to the development of the criteria which may be used to categorise the type and level of complexity of partnerships supporting applied learning. We adapted the social partnerships ‘principles framework’ developed by Clemans, Billet & Seddon (2005) to correspond with the specific features that partnerships formed by schools for the purpose of applied learning provision present. The following rubric has been developed based on the focus group meetings and interviews with students, teachers and principals of the schools involved in the Innovative Partnership ARC research. The rubric’s purpose is to enable schools firstly to map the status of their current partnerships from simple to innovative partnership and to provide a road map to enable schools to advance their partnership from a simple partnership to a best practice innovative partnership.

Table 4 on the next page shows the categories of partnerships distributed on the basis of the following criteria: rationale/goals; partners; processes; level of capacity building; governance and leadership; benefits for students and partners; and assessment. Most importantly, we were able to define what makes an innovative partnership. The innovative partnerships are characterised by long-term cooperation between a number of partners, lasting for a number of years and driven by a strong rationale which is re-defined and transformed over time to maximise the benefits of the partnership. It is supported by high level management and school leadership with strategy, funding, infrastructure and human resources. It is formalised, and has established structures. Such partnerships have long-term benefits for students, community, and partners.
### Table 4 Rubric describing the criteria and types of applied learning partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for partnerships for applied learning</th>
<th>Simple Partnership</th>
<th>Complex Partnership</th>
<th>Innovative Partnership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationale/Goals</strong></td>
<td>Short term/task oriented e.g. organising a BBQ at school, and partnership lasts 1 to 4 weeks.</td>
<td>Partnership challenges the students and may extend over a term, semester or a school year with a specific short-term goal, e.g. organising a fundraising campaign.</td>
<td>Is an ongoing partnership lasting a number of years with the rationale/goals being re-defined and transformed over time to maximise the benefits of partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partners</strong></td>
<td>Does not involve an external partner. For example, a school undertakes a partnership with the Year 7 School Coordinator to organise an event for the Year 7 students.</td>
<td>Involves an external partner and requires cooperation outside the school setting with e.g. the Red Cross or an employer.</td>
<td>Involves a number of external patterns with a common goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Processes (building and maintaining partnership and trust)</strong></td>
<td>Involves only a few steps or stages.</td>
<td>The partnership involves a number of steps/stages that increase in complexity, including identifying the partners, establishing the purpose, undertaking the activities/task, evaluation and critical reflection.</td>
<td>Partnership involves a number of steps of high complexity requiring planning, establishing formal processes, e.g. MOU, stability, permanent representation, e.g. partners become members of a school board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capacity building (resources)</strong></td>
<td>The partnership does not require additional resources, or new infrastructure. Partnership involves an integrated curriculum approach. For example learning outcomes from a number of VCAL strands/units are achieved in the partnership.</td>
<td>The partnership requires additional resources. Support and resources (time rather than money) allocated by both school and partners.</td>
<td>Support and resources (both money and time) allocated by both school and partners’ senior management. Additional external funding is also sought to buy additional equipment and develop infrastructure at school to support the partnership’s goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Governance and leadership</strong></td>
<td>Does not require involvement of school leadership, or any changes in school governance.</td>
<td>School leaders are engaged and supportive. School principals/leadership groups play an important role in securing and supporting partnerships. There is some flexibility of school structures to accommodate the needs of the partnership.</td>
<td>There is a separate role (champion), with appropriate time and budget, created at school (and possibly within the partner’s structures) to manage and coordinate the partnership. School leaders adjust school structures (e.g. timetabling) to enable effective collaboration. There is a succession plan in place for when the current ‘champion’ leaves either the school or the external partnership. Principal is active in all aspects of the program, e.g. communications, promotion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Criteria for partnerships for applied learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Simple Partnership</th>
<th>Complex Partnership</th>
<th>Innovative Partnership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is a ‘real life’ practical ‘hands on’ activity which builds on students’ current interests and abilities. Benefits are short-term.</td>
<td>The partnership has tangible benefits (value added) that can be measured, for both partners. External partner contributes feedback to the students. Partnership provides the opportunity for students to participate in both surface learning (knowing what to do to complete the learning outcomes) and deep learning (articulate the learning to their own life or personal growth).</td>
<td>The partnership has tangible benefits (value added) for both partners that can be measured. Partnership provides the opportunity for students to participate in both surface learning (knowing what to do to complete the learning outcomes) and deep learning (articulate the learning to their own life or personal growth). Partners may play the role of professional mentors that enable skill development and ‘mould’ the professional and social identity of students. Partnership is recognised in local newspapers, nominations for awards e.g. VCAL Achievement Awards or presentation in professional development or other schools visiting the partnership.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Assessment | A variety of appropriate assessment strategies are employed. | Assessment strategies include peer and self-assessment. Evaluation is an essential aspect of all projects. | Critical reflection by all stakeholders e.g. students, teachers and external partners is an important aspect of the program. |

The brief case studies below are a few example of partnership at the innovative end of the rubric.

### INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP EXAMPLE #1

The school selected for the first case study is located in a non-metropolitan region and focuses on the provision of vocational education and training for Year 11 and 12 students. This is a Catholic school which provides School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships and various VET programs leading to Certificate II or III qualifications. It has a Trade Training Centre specialising in electro-technology, furniture making, metal and engineering and human services. All students are required to undertake the Workplace Learning Program of 240 hours over two years, which involves working one day per week throughout the year and several block releases from school. The school timetable is designed around the work placements, which means that students do not miss any regular classroom subjects.

### THE RATIONALE FOR CURRENT VET OFFERINGS AND INVOLVEMENT OF INDUSTRY PARTNERS

Since 1979, the main focus of the school has been the provision of technical education. The school’s success was described by the principal as deriving from its “unique model” and “distinctive spirit and ethos”. It can be argued that there are two components of the current delivery model which make this school distinctive. First, it has a clearly defined purpose - its main objective is to provide students with an employment pathway. Secondly, the school emphasised the role of a strong partnership with business partners which provide students with valuable on-the-job experience.
The sense of local community and engagement with local business partners was indicated as a central element of the school’s culture:

The school VET offerings not only respond to individual student needs and interests but ensure the provision of courses in occupational fields identified by business as experiencing skills shortages.

It is important to emphasise that employability and employment were not seen as narrowly defined goals but rather as means of building meaningful pathways post-school (combining employment and further learning). Moreover the traditional focus on academic subjects and ATAR scores experienced in most secondary schools was seen as limiting young peoples’ choices.

Innovation was also mentioned several times when the principal reflected on the importance of teaching basic technical skills like welding, so the students understood that innovation was possible only upon getting the fundamental knowledge and skills. The students were encouraged to build their own 3-D printer from recycled materials, for example, to illustrate how a basic knowledge of materials and metals can lead to innovation.

PARTNERS
The school listened and responded to local industry needs, and this resulted in strong and long-lasting relationships with local businesses representing various industries, the local parish, and other schools.

PROCESSES
Apart from a well-developed relationship with the local community, the partnership with business has a very solid foundation through the Industry Board which meets regularly and discusses both the industry’s needs and the college’s curriculum.

Having business partners organised in a formal set-up enables greater engagement into curriculum and course development but also provides more industry exposure for young people through meetings, talks and presentations. On the other hand, the industry benefits by having access to a pool of potential employees.

There are regular, fortnightly meetings with two schools in the area. Also, students are assigned into industry-based learning groups which are aligned to an industry area that they are seeing as their potential partner with an industry teacher-mentor.

CAPACITY BUILDING
The school delivery model and the partnerships are supported by the local parish. The partners provide access to innovation, infrastructure, mentorship and workplace learning opportunities.

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP
Industry partners have adjusted their structures to enable more efficient collaboration with the school by creating new positions within their HR department to manage their partnership with a school. This dedicated person is responsible for dealing with all bureaucracy of partnership, contracts and obligations to all partners.

Industry partners also volunteer to work with the teachers and students in non-compulsory activities, outside of school hours.

School’s timetable is organised around workplacements, so students do not miss classes.

The school leaders also emphasised the role of a champion in bringing the vision of technical education to the region. In the case of this school, it was the parish priest who had presided over the area since the 1970s. He has been influential in terms of setting up Catholic technical education and providing funding and an open enrolment policy to all young people, with up to 40% of the students enrolled coming from non-Catholic backgrounds.

BENEFITS
The example of a successful partnership established by the school is dubbed: “a mad scientist experiment”. This partnership is the school’s answer to the collapsing manufacturing industry in Australia. Its objective was to present the metal engineering industry as innovative, different and interesting. The school was approached by a scientist working, among others, for National Geographic, to collaborate on building an underwater biosphere which would be installed in Darling Harbour in Sydney. As part of the project, students have had to build an underwater robot, a robotic machine that would be operated from the inside of the biosphere which would be broadcast via ‘Google classroom’ across the world. The process required students to collaborate with Google via video-conferencing, requiring them to learn new skills.

The industry partners saw productivity and workforce value resulting from the partnership.

High completion rates, industry ‘tasting’, innovation and confidence of students were also reported as the main benefits.
INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP EXAMPLE #2

This school is located in a disadvantaged metropolitan location. It is characterised by a very specific student population, drawn mainly from public housing: 43 per cent of students come from Pacific Islands, 38 per cent are Aboriginal, and 70 per cent are from a single parent family. The school offers a wide curriculum, but enrolment in VET is compulsory.

THE RATIONALE FOR CURRENT VET OFFERINGS AND INVOLVEMENT OF INDUSTRY PARTNERS

The VET pathway was perceived as a way of reducing socio-economic disadvantage through engagement. Providing compulsory VET was seen as supporting engagement through applied learning, which led to employment outcomes post-school. Reducing socio-economic disadvantage through participation in VET was an important part of the school’s philosophy, ensuring that industry partners had an understanding of the schools’ clientele and provided a safe and respectful environment.

Providing the students with a variety of skills through close partnerships with training providers and industry is seen as the way of providing the most disadvantaged with opportunities they would not otherwise get.

PARTNERS

The school has set up cooperation with over 300 partners and organises annual dinners, catered by the students, which bring all the partners together.

PROCESSES

The school has introduced an early commencement option so that younger students not normally allowed to enrol in VET (14-15 years of age) can be engaged in the world of work through VET.

CAPACITY BUILDING

When asked about the expectations of the school regarding the partners, the VET coordinator explained that “providing a secure environment and maintaining values and respect” were the most important elements.

TAFE as partner helped establish ‘discreet courses’ which are 14-week preparation programs run prior to starting the VET course, which enables students to ‘taste’ the requirements of TAFE.

Some of the business partners provide in-kind support. For example, the school bus and a car were funded by two private companies as transport is very limited in the area and many students were not able to travel to TAFE for classes.

The school has also invested in a trade training centre for metal engineering and hospitality.

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

The resources to support the position of VET coordinator were mentioned as crucial. The VET coordinator was instrumental in setting up the Trade Training Centre, preparing the timetabling for the whole school so that it was most efficient for the TVET students.

BENEFITS

The school gave several examples of successful partnerships which provided safe environments and valuable workplace learning opportunities for their students. For example, the school had established a very close relationship with a large international Law and PR company which was a reliable partner in terms of workplace training for apprentices. Two of the students were offered positions in the overseas branches of the company after completion of their studies. A similar example was provided of a construction and engineering company sending its graduates to Hong Kong to continue their apprenticeships. It also partnered with local TAFE and university.

It has been consistently recognised for its efforts with VET provision. Students, teachers and the VET coordinator have been nominated for, or have received, state or regional awards.
4. FINDINGS - WHAT MAKES INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP?

INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP EXAMPLE #3

This is a metropolitan secondary school with over 800 VET enrolments. Over 40% of the students have a language background other than English. They include a number of refugee students who do not have a social network beyond the school. It is a Sports Academy which caters for a range of sports, including rugby, basketball, soccer and AFL.

THE RATIONALE FOR CURRENT VET OFFERINGS AND INVOLVEMENT OF INDUSTRY PARTNERS

The school focuses on increasing literacy and numeracy levels, and also the wellbeing of the students. Providing a sense of belonging and connecting to the local community has underpinned all the partnerships formed.

Sport is used as a tool to engage the children at the school, and build connections with the local community.

PARTNERS

Over a quarter of the students have been enrolled in Sport and Recreation courses, and appropriately a majority of the partners represent sporting clubs or state sporting associations, including the Melbourne Storm rugby club and the Dandenong Stingrays. The Sport Academy is also supported by the local government, and a number of local sports clubs.

The school also partners with not-for-profit organisations to get funding and mentoring support.

PROCESSES

The Sports Academy is a structured group with several tiers, which include small grassroots clubs at the bottom tier and the top sporting clubs at the higher level. The top tier partners provide expertise, mentorship, coaching and facilities. It took over a year to establish the Academy, with formal support from the local government and the department of education.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The school partners with not-for-profit organisations to get funding and mentoring support. The elite sports clubs provide resources, personnel and “the ability to be able to market our school through those elite sports”. centre for metal engineering and hospitality.

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

The school staff are often sports coaches outside of school, so they establish and maintain the relationship with sporting clubs outside of school. The school principal actively promotes the program in the region and interstate.

BENEFITS

The Sports Academy achieves the objective set by the school: to look after the well-being of students and to increase their engagement at school and in the local community.

The school sporting and training success has been recognised annually through the Victorian School Sports Awards. In 2015 it was also recognised for its community partnerships.
The analysis above indicates that the motivations of schools for forming partnerships are varied and the benefits are numerous and significant. However, all respondents identified issues associated with the formation and maintenance of partnerships, including:

- Quality of the external VET providers,
- Resourcing and leadership,
- Stability and continuity,
- Networking with community and employers, and
- The place of VET and applied learning within the traditional structures of schools.

These factors may be considered to be the conditions for achieving educational outcomes through successful partnerships. It is clear from our research that some schools have found it challenging to form meaningful partnerships and to interact effectively with a diverse range of employers, community groups and government agencies. Even under the most favourable conditions, aspects of the current system’s weaknesses undermine the positive impact of these partnerships. A number of challenges are associated with establishing and maintaining partnerships. The largest and most important partnerships seem to be those that are formed with VET providers and employers, but these have emerged from our study as also being the most challenging in terms of supporting students’ smooth transitions to work and further study.

The findings of this study confirm the changing nature of secondary school programs in recent years. Teaching and educational provision no longer remain exclusively linked to one institution, and new and innovative programs are being implemented to involve the wider community in learning and skills development. The most visible, and arguably the most important of these innovations, are the applied learning programs that have been introduced into all the senior certificates in Australia and which require the building of partnerships with various community actors. The perceived benefits for students deriving from these programs are clear to the students themselves, their teachers and the external partners.

The idea of choice

The issue of choice also relates to school processes for subject selection and the ways in which students negotiate the choice of vocational subjects within the constraints of the senior secondary curriculum and its associated senior school certificate. Most schools noted that, subject to availability, students’ choices were subject to the same rules as choosing other senior certificate subjects such as English or maths. This clearly illustrates what Lannelli and Raffe (2007) have described as the ‘education logic’ paradigm of delivery, whereby vocational studies are required to fit within the traditional academic requirements of secondary schooling structures – timetabling arrangements, focus on theoretical studies, compliance with university entry requirements and meeting the needs of the majority of the students (who are not enrolled in vocational subjects). There were also concerns expressed relating to the uncertain and sometimes unguided process by which students selected their subjects. In response to the question of whether the subject selection process for vocational studies was like the process for selecting mainstream subjects, a respondent replied: “No different. We don’t see any difference between the two. So one’s not better than the other, it’s just different.” The same respondent continued to describe the challenges of different class sizes in different schools participating in the program, the challenges of meeting the requirements of the Hospitality certificate within the tight schedule of timetabled subjects, and the fact that assessment requirements were the same whether the course was offered in a TAFE Institute or a school, despite the major differences in environment.

One problem is that the majority of the schools in our study offered VET courses on the basis of student choice “or what takes their fancy” (VET coordinator from Victoria). This market-based education approach is problematic, as it is based on the premise that a high school student has adequate knowledge of course pathways, career possibilities and opportunities within the education system and the labour market. We know from previous research that the majority of students undertaking VET studies in high school come from a lower SES background (Teese & Polesel 2003) and as a consequence these students make decisions within the confines of the opportunities available to them. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to participate in courses that provide a direct pathway to work, without further formal education or training. While the choice and flexibility offered by vocational programs may contribute to higher levels of student engagement and attendance at the school, it may undermine the successful transition of students from school. School students need meaningful career development advice including information on the educational pathways and data related to the expected labour market outcomes for their selected profession. Schools can assist students to create...
clear, coherent and transparent pathways from foundational qualifications to intermediate and higher level qualifications through the provision of thematic curriculum options (Clarke 2013). Instead of including a set of VET subjects alongside the mainstream or academic subject offerings, schools can ensure that students select a set of subjects that support each other to form a coherent program and provide opportunities for the development of foundational disciplinary knowledge and skills (Clarke 2013).

Schools’ selection of VET courses and VET providers needs to be based on a thorough understanding of student interests and capabilities but most importantly on the current and future labour market needs, the quality of the VET providers, and the ability – of school and VET provider - to link the course content to a relevant and meaningful work-placement. A ‘sizable’ workplace learning component plays an especially important role for students’ work-related skills development and post-school labour market outcomes (Black, Polidano & Tabasso 2011). The combination of all these factors would improve the chances of students being able to explore the selected occupation more deeply and to make more informed post-school choices.

“Hands on” learning style

Another challenge raised in our study regarding partnerships relates to the perceived “easier” nature of the related courses. Many students indicated a preference for VET courses because of their “hands on” learning style. Te Riele and Crump (2002) argue that what is underpinning students’ desire for practical studies is, perhaps, their experience of learning as “foreign” and non-applicable to their needs and day-to-day lives. Students tend to self-assess their performance record in academic studies, which impacts on their self-construction as learners. They construct self-identities based on their perceptions of their abilities, strengths and aspirations and select particular pathway options because they see these as providing a “better match” with their self-identity (Anlezark et al 2006; Atweh et al 2005). They use their early performance to update their beliefs about their fit with particular pathways and these beliefs in turn influence further decisions (Kreisman and Stange 2014). Lower performing students see applied learning and vocational education and training subjects and courses as being a better fit for them because they build on their interests and capabilities and help them develop and apply knowledge and skills (te Riele and Crump, 2002). This raises questions about students’ motivation for choosing applied learning and vocational learning pathways. By selecting pathway options based on an assessment of best fit for them, students may reinforce self-fulfilling prophecies and deficit views of themselves as learners.

The evidence from this study suggests that the applied approach to learning is preferable, as it provides students with a learning pedagogy that incorporates a diverse range of approaches to learning, for example experiential, hands-on, active learning and work-based learning approaches.
5. CONCLUSIONS

However, both theoretical knowledge and practical skills are needed. Research suggests that ‘powerful knowledge’ should be at the centre of the curriculum in all sectors of education (Wheelahan, 2012; Young and Muller, 2010; and Beck, 2013). Additionally, Haywood (2015) suggests that the dominance of the assessment regime in the senior years of schooling contributes to students’ difficulties with academic subjects as well as their self-identities. Further work is needed on adjusting the VET curriculum in schools with a view to increasing students’ exposure to ‘powerful knowledge’ without undermining their self-identities. Schools can ensure students’ access to quality curriculum and pedagogy by making existing curriculum boundaries more flexible. This may entail, for example, as Blake (2007) suggests, the re-conceptualisation of ‘learning and teaching’ by including a broader range of learning approaches. In this way, applied, learning and vocational pedagogies become legitimate approaches within both the general and the applied and vocational learning school curriculum. This would benefit a greater range of students, including those who chose traditional pathways but will require new theoretical understandings in order to reform secondary school education.

**Short-term partnerships**

Partnerships with employers and local industry seem to have an overwhelmingly positive outcome for students, exposing them to a variety of industry and social experiences, providing them with a “taste” of industries and increasing their self-esteem and confidence. However, many schools do not have long-term, formalised partnerships with industry. Many have long lists of employers who from time to time are willing to provide some sort of work-placement. However, it seems that having business partners organised in more formal ways would enable schools to more effectively engage them in curriculum and course development. It would also provide students with an increased level of exposure to industries through meetings, talks and presentations. Unfortunately, in our study the formal involvement of local businesses within school structures was the exception rather than the rule, as the majority of schools relied on the private contacts of parents and students. Schools have become overburdened with the responsibilities of finding suitable work-placements and coordinating these relationships. Schools need financial and human resources to employ work-placement coordinators to assist them in this regard. Industry brokers, such as those helping schools connect with employers in the state of NSW, were a good resource, but were at times found to be inflexible, sometimes offering placements without understanding local issues, such as public transport provision or the need to travel long distances to placements.

In summary, we argue that the findings of our study point to the need to reconsider the structures of the relationships schools form with external organisations, the need to formalise and recognise them through adequate funding and to support the work required to bring them to fruition and maintain them, and finally the need to reconceptualise vocational and applied learning pathways as an integral part of senior secondary schooling with their own distinct and deserving needs.


Owen, C. (2004). *Have we got what it takes?: The skills, rewards and recognition needed for teachers, youth workers and others in Learning Alternatives.* Sydney: Dusseldorp Skills Forum


| **APPENDIX A: FRAMEWORK** |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>School</strong></th>
<th><strong>Partner</strong></th>
<th><strong>Student</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background</strong></td>
<td>Describe catchment area</td>
<td>List where students come from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describe students undertaking</td>
<td>Describe the learning program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Outsource</td>
<td>Rationale or philosophy for providing Applied learning</td>
<td>Rationale or philosophy for providing applied learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are you able to meet the demand for AL?</td>
<td>What is your motivation behind providing job experience for school-age students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Are you able to meet the demand for AL?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s Involved</td>
<td>Are students charged a fee?</td>
<td>Are students charged a fee?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you choose students?</td>
<td>How do you choose your course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you choose partnering organisation?</td>
<td>Administration requirements: what does the partner provide...e.g. timetabling, equipment, transport, staffing, money, mentoring, professional development etc...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administration requirements: what does the school provide...e.g. timetabling, equipment, transport, staffing, money, mentoring, professional development etc...</td>
<td>Please describe the accountability arrangements that are in place between your institution and the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please describe the accountability arrangements that are in place between the school/s and your partners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>What do you expect for your students at the end of this program?</td>
<td>What do you expect for your students at the end of this program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you expect from your partnering institution?</td>
<td>Does your institution provide any mentoring or guidance (or any other forms of support) to your students to support their completion, outcomes and pathways?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you define effective/successful partnership?</td>
<td>How do you define effective/successful partnership?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality</td>
<td>Any completion rates?</td>
<td>In what ways is the program different from the more traditional subjects at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any retention rates?</td>
<td>Can you tell us what you hope to be doing when you leave school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Improvements</td>
<td>How could the partnership with the school be changed to improve completion rates?</td>
<td>How could the partnership with the school be changed to improve completion rates?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please describe any existing, planned or suggested strategies to improve VET provision, arrangements and student outcomes for school-age students</td>
<td>Please describe any existing, planned or suggested strategies to improve VET provision, arrangements and student outcomes for school-age students</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Dear Principal,

You are invited to participate in a project titled: “Innovative partnerships for youth engagement in education and work” by completing an online, anonymous survey. This project is funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant in partnership with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, NSW Department of Education and Communities, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, Catholic Education Commission of NSW, SA Department for Education and Child Development, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, Catholic Education Office (SA) and Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, and is being undertaken by the University of Melbourne and Deakin University.

This project seeks to investigate the demands of applied learning and VET programs in upper secondary schools in NSW, Victoria and SA. It focuses on the partnerships schools form with TAFEs, employers and other organisations that support these programs. It tests the quality of these programs in building youth engagement and establishing pathways into further study, work and skill based occupations. It also examines their impact on the work of teachers, leadership of schools and on the resources and school personnel capacities required to support them.

Schools form partnerships to support a broad range of activities, including VET, applied learning and flexible learning. Moreover, the different systems and jurisdictions have different approaches to defining and implementing applied learning, flexible learning and VETiS. This survey is designed to be inclusive of all these approaches. It is attempting to build an understanding of the broad range of partnerships that support these activities for youth engagement. For this reason, we are seeking to include partnerships that support the following areas:

VETiS – programs that involve the delivery of Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualifications by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

Applied Learning - experiential, hands-on, active learning which provides practical, work-related experience, and other skills that are important for life and work

Flexible Learning – Flexible school and/or community based learning programs, which may include individual case management.

The responses from School Principals, VETiS and applied/flexible learning coordinators and any relevant personnel will be greatly appreciated.

Survey monkey is used to administer a survey targeting all secondary schools across the three states. The survey asks participants to reflect on their experiences of applied learning programs, and the partnerships which schools form with employers and other organisations that support applied learning programs. Participants will also be asked to comment on the impact of these partnerships on the work of teachers, on the leadership of schools and the resources and school personnel capacities required to support the partnerships.
The survey will take approximately 20 minutes.

Participation in the study is voluntary and you may discontinue participation at any time. This survey is completely anonymous and the confidentiality of your responses will be protected subject to legal limitations. You may choose to identify your school for the purpose of further research. Data collected during the research process will be stored, according to the University of Melbourne regulations, in a private and secure location at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education for a period of five years and will then be destroyed.

Please, forward this link to any relevant personnel in your school. Multiple responses from each school are welcome.

If you consent to participate in this research you should click ‘NEXT’ and respond to the survey questions following. Your consent will be assumed once you have submitted the completed survey.

Thank you for your participation.

1. Do you consent to taking part in this survey?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

Innovative Partnerships for youth engagement (schools)

2. What is your position at this school/educational organisation?
   - [ ] Principal
   - [ ] Assistant Principal
   - [ ] VET coordinator
   - [ ] Applied/Flexible Learning Coordinator
   - Other (please specify)

3. In which state and region is your school/organisation located?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. To which sector does your school/organisation belong?
   - Government
   - Catholic
   - Independent

5. Which category best describes your school/organisation?
   - Prep - Year 10
   - Prep - Year 12
   - Year 7-12
   - Year 8-12
   - Year 9-12
   - Year 10-12
   - Year 11-12
   - Specialist Secondary (e.g. sport and rec)
   - Special school
   - Other (please specify)

6. Which category best describes the student population at your school/organisation?
   - More than 1000 students
   - 501-1000 students
   - 101-500 students
   - 100 or under
7. Do you offer any applied learning, VET or flexible learning options at or through your school/organisation?

- Yes
- No

Please list all applied learning/VET/Flexible Learning programs available, and at which levels they are offered

8. How many students are involved in applied learning/VET/Flexible learning options at your school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>VET</th>
<th>FLO</th>
<th>Applied learning</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
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<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify)
9. Please comment on how you decide which young people are able to access the applied learning/VET/flexible learning options and any issues associated with this process.


10. To what extent do you think the process of accessing applied learning/VET/flexible learning options is well understood in your organisation?

- Very well understood
- Mostly understood
- Limited understanding
- No understanding

Please comment on the understanding about how these programs are accessed across your organisation


11. To what extent do you consider the following groups of students benefit from your organisation's applied learning/VET/flexible learning options?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High degree of benefit</th>
<th>Some benefit</th>
<th>Little benefit</th>
<th>No benefit</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students seeking pathways to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>employment upon leaving school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students seeking training</td>
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<tr>
<td>pathways through a TAFE or VET</td>
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<tr>
<td>provider upon leaving school</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High degree of benefit</td>
<td>Some benefit</td>
<td>Little benefit</td>
<td>No benefit</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students seeking an apprenticeship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students seeking a pathway to university upon leaving school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students who have disengaged from learning at school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students from indigenous backgrounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students who are refugees or recent arrivals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students with special learning needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students who have an ESL background</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students from low SES background</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male students</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female students</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please comment on any other groups of students who benefit from your applied learning/VET/flexible learning programs

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**INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION AND WORK**

64
12. To what extent do students experience the following benefits from participation in your organisation's applied learning/VET/flexible learning options?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High degree of benefit</th>
<th>Some benefit</th>
<th>Little benefit</th>
<th>No benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employability skills (working in a team, problem solving, communication)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic and personal development skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved understanding of career pathways</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy and Numeracy skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased engagement in learning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased engagement with the wider community</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased likelihood of completing year 12 or equivalent</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased self-confidence and self-esteem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased health and wellbeing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please comment on any other benefits

13. What aspects of the applied learning/VET/flexible learning do you think facilitate the most benefit for students' learning and engagement?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High degree of benefit</th>
<th>Some benefit</th>
<th>Little benefit</th>
<th>No benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The opportunity to learn in workplace and community settings</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High degree of benefit</td>
<td>Some benefit</td>
<td>Little benefit</td>
<td>No benefit</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>More adult-like relationships with educators/supervisors</td>
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<tr>
<td>The opportunity for a more flexible approach to learning and completing Year 12 or its equivalent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concrete pathways to employment and training</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning linked to real-world problems and contexts</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to integrate VET and applied learning with senior schooling</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Credentialed recognition of learning beyond school and classrooms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognition of valuable qualities, attributes and capabilities that are otherwise not recognised in school</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunity to volunteer in community-oriented projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practical hands-on activities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please comment on any other aspects of the learning in the programs that facilitate students’ learning and engagement.
14. What types and number of ‘partner organisations’ support the provision of applied learning/VET/flexible learning options offered by your organisation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ten or more</th>
<th>8-9</th>
<th>6-7</th>
<th>4-5</th>
<th>2-3</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Training Organisation (RTO)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Community Organisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not-for-profit organisation (e.g. Brotherhood of St Laurence)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Skills Councils (ITABs)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional associations of employers (ACCI, AIG, etc.)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please comment on any other types of partner organisations supporting your programs.
### 15. What role does the partner play in your applied learning/VET/Flexible learning option?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Partner</th>
<th>TAFE</th>
<th>Private Training Organisation (RTO)</th>
<th>Local Community Organisation</th>
<th>Not-for-profit organisation (e.g. Brotherhood of St Laurence)</th>
<th>Other schools</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Industry Skills Councils (ITABs)</th>
<th>Professional associations of employers (ACCI, AIG, etc.)</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An auspicing arrangement where the provider allows us to deliver the applied learning/VET at the school campus</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A business partnership with local employers or industry group providing access to workplace learning opportunities</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The partner delivers the entire senior secondary program for us using an applied learning approach and flexible curriculum</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The partner provides opportunities for students to learn in community-oriented projects that align with the organisation’s objectives</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If you have a partnership with the same type of organisation but under different arrangement, please specify here. Also please comment on any other roles played by partnering organisations.*
16. To what extent do you think the following partnering arrangements are effective?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arrangement</th>
<th>Highly effective</th>
<th>Mostly effective</th>
<th>Mostly ineffective</th>
<th>Highly ineffective</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A purchasing arrangement for delivery away from school site</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>An auspicing arrangement where the provider allows us to deliver the applied learning/VET at the school campus</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A business partnership with local employers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A business partnership with industry groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Our partner delivers the entire senior secondary program for us using an applied learning approach and curriculum</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A partnership with a RTO organised through a school cluster</td>
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<tr>
<td>We don’t have any partnerships, our school delivers all the applied learning/VET</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please comment on effectiveness of partnering arrangements to support your programs.

17. If you have more than one type of partnership, what factors determine the type of partnership you choose?
18. To what extent are the following factors significant in your formation of partnering arrangements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access to a wider range of curriculum components</th>
<th>Very significant</th>
<th>Mostly significant</th>
<th>Mostly insignificant</th>
<th>Not significant at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost effective delivery of applied learning programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Better quality learning programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to specific expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to individuals and organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provision of resources</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>More innovative delivery and assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Links to industry which better prepare students' work readiness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Training Package requirements</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Expectations of Industry for workplace learning and/or assessment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please comment on any factors significant in your formation of partnering arrangements

19. Please describe what your partners contribute to the applied learning/VET/flexible learning options e.g. venue, staffing, curriculum etc.
20. To what extent have the following organisations/networks played a role in INITIATING your partnering arrangements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation/Most Relevant Network</th>
<th>Highly significant role</th>
<th>Moderately significant role</th>
<th>Limited role</th>
<th>No role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Department of Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Workplace learning coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Private Training Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not-for-profit organisation</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School's own networking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Learning and Employment Networks (e.g. LLENs) in Victoria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work Placement Service Providers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Training Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry Skills Councils (ITABs)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional associations of employers (ACCI, AIG, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Learning Teacher Association</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please comment on the initiation and maintenance of your partnering arrangements
21. To what extent have the following organisations/networks played a role in MAINTAINING your partnering arrangements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation/Network</th>
<th>Highly significant role</th>
<th>Moderately significant role</th>
<th>Limited role</th>
<th>No role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Department of Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace learning coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Training Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community organisation</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not-for-profit organisation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>School's own networking</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Learning and Employment Networks (e.g. LLENs) in Victoria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Placement Service Providers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Training Organisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Skills Councils (ITABs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional associations of employers (ACCI, AIG, etc.)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated teacher in the school (Champion)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please comment on the initiation and maintenance of your partnering arrangements.
22. How does your organisation's leadership support the relationship with external partners?

23. Who is mostly responsible for leading and managing applied learning/VET/flexible learning partnership arrangements in your organisation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>High degree of leadership and responsibility</th>
<th>Moderate degree of leadership and responsibility</th>
<th>Limited degree of leadership and responsibility</th>
<th>No leadership and responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VETIS coordinator</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated Partnership coordinator</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12 coordinator</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Learning Programs Coordinator</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24. How would you rate the following skill sets that your teachers may need to implement these partnerships effectively?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Set</th>
<th>Highly significant</th>
<th>Mostly Significant</th>
<th>Mostly insignificant</th>
<th>Not significant at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior experiences in industry</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broader conception of learning</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cert IV Training and Assessment</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other formal study in VET</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacities in networking and community partnerships</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity for teachers to use applied learning to respond to individual learning needs</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please comment on skill sets required by teachers to build and maintain partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Set</th>
<th>Highly Significant</th>
<th>Mostly Significant</th>
<th>Mostly Insignificant</th>
<th>Not Significant at All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited human resources</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited financial resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reluctance of external partners to be involved</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reluctance from students to be involved</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers are overloaded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental reluctance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workplace, health and safety concerns</td>
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Please comment on barriers to the effective implementation of partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to Effective Implementation</th>
<th>Highly Significant</th>
<th>Mostly Significant</th>
<th>Mostly Insignificant</th>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

25. To what extent are the following factors a barrier to the effective implementation of partnerships?

26. Please comment on any strategies you are using (or intend to use) to overcome barriers.
27. Please comment on any risks associated with the applied learning/VET/flexible learning options and partnerships supporting them.

28. Please comment on how you are managing any risks associated with the applied learning/VET/flexible learning options and partnerships supporting them.

29. Please provide an example of a partnership you consider to be highly successful and comment on why it is successful.
30. Would you like to further enhance and expand your applied learning/VET/flexible learning partnerships?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Please explain:

31. What additional resources and circumstances would be significant to facilitate this expansion?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource/Option</th>
<th>Highly Significant</th>
<th>Mostly Significant</th>
<th>Mostly Insignificant</th>
<th>Not Significant at All</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Additional financial resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Willingness of external partners to be involved</td>
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<td>PD for teachers for applied learning</td>
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</table>

Other (please specify):

32. Please include any other comments regarding your applied learning/VET/flexible learning options and partnerships that facilitate these.

33. If you would like to be contacted for further research at your school following-up on this survey, please provide your contact details below.
This publication reports the findings of a research study funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage grant awarded to Investigators Professor John Polesel (University of Melbourne), Professor Jack Keating (University of Melbourne), Professor Karen Starr (Deakin University), Associate Professor Damian Blake (Deakin University), Mr David Gallagher (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority) and Mr David Michaels (New South Wales Department of Education and Communities). The project was also supported by funding provided by the industry partners - Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Victorian Department of Education and Training, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, Catholic Education Commission New South Wales, South Australia Department for Education and Child Development, New South Wales Department of Education and Communities, Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales, and Catholic Education South Australia.
INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION AND WORK

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JOHN POLESEL
NICKY DULFER
KAREN STARR
DAMIAN BLAKE