Title: The Teacher Education of VET in Schools (VETiS) Teachers

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About the research

The teacher education of VET in Schools (VETiS) teachers

Mike Brown and Karen O’Reilly-Briggs, La Trobe University

This study investigates the professional preparation of teachers working in Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs in Australian secondary schools. It also investigates the similarities and differences and the enablers and blockers that occur across the various states and territories in their approaches to providing teacher education for VET in Schools (VETiS) teachers. The research focuses on the supply-side of university-based VET teacher education programs and offers a stocktake of the VET method area offerings that are available (and not available) for pre-service teachers in Australia.

Key messages

- There are concerns regarding the efficacy and expertise of VET in Schools teachers;

- The requirement for VET in Schools teachers to have a teaching degree in order to be able to teach in schools has been removed. Accordingly, they are no longer required to gain full teacher registration;

- Some universities that have taught VET as a method area in the past to pre-service teachers have discontinued the offering;

- Demand by pre-service teachers within current models of teacher education to undertake VET as a method area is low and has made it an unviable offering for many universities;

- VET as a method area is usually low on the list of university subject offerings for pre-service teachers. With about one in eight of all secondary school students doing VET in Schools, maybe there should be a subject within all secondary teacher education programs that teaches pre-service teachers about VET in Schools.
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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics

This research received La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee approval number: E16-123.

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Introduction

This study provides a brief investigation and stocktake of university-based teacher education programs that prepare teachers for working in Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) programs across Australia. Current minimum requirements for VET in Schools teachers require that they have their base VET qualification and experience in their occupation which they then build onto with professional knowledge and skills related to education and training. Some do their education and training qualifications and professional learning through the VET sector with a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, and others build further by undertaking a university-based teacher education program, gaining a higher credential. This study researches the provision of university-based teacher education programs for VET in Schools teachers.

Universities have two dominant models in place for secondary teacher education. Both are set up to provide particular pathways for two different cohorts. To meet teacher registration requirements, teachers need to satisfactorily complete four years of university study. Consequently, a Bachelor of Teaching is a four year undergraduate degree. These undergraduate degrees are designed predominantly for students transitioning to university after completing Year 12 with places offered based on an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) score. For secondary teachers these programs incorporate building specialist subject knowledge in tandem with completing education and teaching subjects within their undergraduate program.

The second pathway is a Master of Teaching program that is based on the superseded Diploma of Education model. Under this arrangement, prospective secondary teachers complete an undergraduate degree to acquire their subject/learning area specialisation, before undertaking a two year Master of Teaching degree to build education and teaching knowledge and capacities on top of the existing subject specialisation knowledge gained during their initial undergraduate degree.

Neither of these models are particularly suited to student teachers wanting to become VET in Schools teachers. These pre-service teachers need a hybrid model where they can build upon their VET qualification and industry experience.

However, universities find it difficult to accommodate the needs of VET in Schools teachers as they arrive at higher education as mature age non-traditional learners through discontinuous and interrupted VET articulation. Subsequently to address and meet the specific needs of VET in Schools teachers, as pre-service teachers and higher education students, university-based teacher education programs are required to design
unique pathways and innovative programs to accommodate this non-traditional cohort.

The purpose of this study is to investigate and document the current situation with respect to the provision of professional learning and qualification needs for VET in Schools teachers with particular regard to the undertaking of university-based teacher education. The study aims to identify some of the enablers and blockers with particular emphasis on the supply-side of this provision.

The study has three tiers. The first tier involved conducting a national web-based survey of VET in Schools stakeholders. The respondents consisted of staff from Curriculum Authorities, Principals, Vice-Principals, Program coordinators, and VET in Schools teachers. This survey data was complemented through a second tier that consisted of a stocktake of existing university-based teacher education courses for VET in Schools teachers. This involved a national review of the faculties across Australia who provide teacher education programs. Data was collected through telephone interviews and written digital communication with a purposive sample of faculty leaders, Program Coordinators, and lecturers within university-based teacher education programs. Only six universities were identified as currently providing teacher education for VET in Schools teachers. Some examples of innovative practice were identified and these are presented as vignettes.

The findings from this study establish a baseline that documents current practice associated with the provision of university-based teacher education. Further, it begins to provide data on how these faculties might respond in the future to the higher education needs of the VET in Schools teaching workforce moving forward.
Context

This chapter explains the context of the study and provides a review of selected literature. In setting the context it becomes apparent that VET remains a potentially powerful strategy for preparing young people for the changing world of work, although challenges have been identified. Despite this, VET stands as the main alternative for the majority of senior secondary students who do not gain access or wish to continue on to the professional education offered by universities. VET in Schools is mostly offered to senior secondary students in Years 11 & 12. NCVER (2016) report that there are nearly a quarter of a million enrolments across the country in VET in Schools, while the total number of enrolments in secondary schools is around 1.5 million.

What the literature says

The youth employment crisis and skills mismatch between labour needs and education systems has highlighted the importance of vocational education and training (VET) and the vital role that the VET sector plays in supporting industries and national economies (Foundation for Young Australians, 2017; ILO, 2015).

Economies are becoming increasingly globalised and complex, and new technologies have already begun to disrupt the ways that we live and work (Torii & O’Connell, 2017). Transformational change is underway, and Australia is facing unprecedented challenges as a consequence of globalisation, transforming industries, and changes to employment (CEDA, 2016). High levels of youth unemployment are at odds with the nation’s economic goals and represent ‘lost opportunities’ for young people and the economy (Foundation for Young Australians, 2017; Lamb & Huo, 2017). The capability of the VET system to meet skill needs and prepare young people for future industries and economies is largely dependent on the quality and capability of its teachers—and by extension, the quality of teacher education systems. The International Labour Office (ILO) have identified a need to reinvigorate the VET system with teacher training programs that are “effective, efficient, equitable and innovative, and coherent with national and local objectives” (ILO, 2015, p. xiv).

The Committee for Economic Development in Australia (CEDA) are critical of the senior secondary education system and its apparent failure to both engage and properly prepare students for the transition between school and further education and employment (CEDA, 2016). In response to this
crisis, CEDA have recommended an alternative approach to secondary education that places more emphasis on vocational learning in an effort to assist the many young people who struggle to secure a foothold in the labour market.

VET in Schools

The VET system is essential for providing young people with pathways to skilled occupations, and equip the workforce with the technical skills required to resource the ‘higher demands’ of industry and the nation’s economy (Education Services Australia, 2014; Torii & O’Connell, 2017). In the early 1990s, the VET in Schools (VETiS) program was introduced in Australia as a policy instrument to assist governments in their mission to engage and retain senior secondary students in schools, and provide occupational skills to those students not intending to pursue an academic pathway into higher education (Clarke & Polesel, 2013). Today, there are over 240,000 VET in Schools students in Australia (NCVER, 2016)—the overwhelming majority of whom are from low SES backgrounds (CEDA, 2016). Approximately 40 per cent of all secondary students go on to university after secondary school, while 60 per cent (i.e. the majority) do not (Education Services Australia, 2014).

VET in Schools was designed to expand opportunities and pathways for improved educational outcomes for students in line with the federal government’s objective of increasing the number of young people completing Year 12 or equivalent. Today VET in Schools is offered in over 90 per cent of Australian schools, makes up the core part of schooling for many Australians, and is offered as a complementary course of study for students looking to achieve a nationally recognised VET qualification while
undertaking a senior secondary certificate. The primary objectives of school-based VET programs are to:

i) facilitate student transitions between school and work;
ii) generate a highly skilled workforce (Porter, 2006); and
iii) increase the number of young people completing Year 12 or equivalent (Education Services Australia, 2014; Victorian State Government, 2017).

In light of these objectives, the VET in Schools program has been frequently criticised for its failure to create smooth transitions for students between school and employment or further education (CEDA, 2016). Although VET in Schools appears to have achieved its goal of retaining greater numbers of students to Year 12 (Torii & O’Connell, 2017), its reputation continues to suffer from a multitude of grievances, such as, for example, a perception that it is: a less prestigious option than an academic pathway to university; less valued by students and parents than other options; considered of poor quality; inferior to other forms of VET provision (Education Services Australia, 2014); lacking in employer recognition; failing to engage and inspire students to transition from secondary school into apprenticeships, traineeships and post-school VET study (CEDA, 2016; Clarke & Polesel, 2013); and lacking in on-the-job training opportunities (CEDA, 2016). The fact that the overwhelming majority of secondary students do not transition on to university from secondary school, and the VET in Schools system is not meeting its intended skills and labour objectives, would indicate that there are deficiencies with the program in need of addressing. Further, it raises serious concerns regarding the quality of education available to senior secondary students and the efficacy of those responsible for teaching it.

VET in Schools teachers

As industry is reported to be losing confidence in the VET sector (Australian Skills Quality Authority, 2016; Hare, 2017; VECCI, 2015), there is growing concern about the quality of education in VET. In Australia, the nature and qualification level of those teaching VET “is a highly contested and political topic” (Smith, Hodge, & Yasukawa, 2015, p. 419). Although it is argued that the knowledge and skills required by VET teachers would most logically sit at Level VII of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (i.e. professional work), VET teachers in Australia require a comparatively low-level Certificate IV (skilled work; pre-university) qualification (p. 420) that is often poorly delivered and even avoidable (Smith & Grace, 2011, p. 205). As such, the majority of VET teachers are only required to possess a
teaching qualification at a much lower level than that required by teachers in other sectors (Smith et al., 2015, p. 419).

Trade and VET teaching qualifications have not always resided at a Certificate Level IV. Until the 1990s, the majority of full time Technical and Further Education (TAFE) VET teachers were required to be degree level qualified, and it was not until the introduction of competency-based training package curriculum that the first iteration of the Certificate Level IV in Training and Assessment qualification was introduced in 1998 (Smith et al., 2015, p. 420). Brown (2017) argues that the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment teacher qualification is inadequate for teaching VET in Schools, as VET in Schools teachers are required to have a deep understanding of education and teaching that is only acquired through the completion of a university-based teacher education program (p. 1). Brown (2017) further argues that in order to teach vocationally relevant skills to a standard commensurate with industry, VET in Schools teaching positions are best filled by those with vocational qualifications (e.g. trade qualifications) who have developed their expertise via extensive industry experience.

As reasonable as this recommendation may sound, it is somewhat problematic in the context of the Australian education system, pathways and qualification requirements. While tradespeople with vocational experience and expertise may be ideal candidates for the task of teaching their vocational skills and knowledge to young people, they are not part of the traditional cohort recruited to university-based teacher education programs, as most university courses are designed to recruit academically-inclined students transitioning from Year 12 (p. 2). This leaves us in the position where, somewhat ironically, the very people with the desired vocational qualifications, industrial experience and networks needed to teach VET in Schools, experience difficulties in gaining entry to a teacher education AQF Level VII program—given that their industrial qualification is likely to be stationed at a comparatively low Level III or IV (p. 3). Tradespeople and other vocational practitioners wanting to become VET in Schools and Technology teachers can face resistance from universities reluctant to grant advanced standing or tailor teacher education programs suited to these non-traditional learners (p. 6).

Another problem for teacher quality concerns the recent reversal of a requirement for VET in Schools teachers in Victoria (working on school premises) to possess a university-based pedagogical qualification and Victorian Institute of Teachers (VIT) registration. VET in Schools teachers are now only required to hold the AQF Level IV in Training and Assessment qualification—the same qualification as other teachers and trainers working in the VET sector (p. 6), such as TAFE. Given recent calls by the International Labour Organisation and Committee for Economic
Development in Australia to improve the standard and quality of VET provision, including the quality of teachers responsible for the teaching of VET students, the decision to remove the requirement for these teachers to possess a teaching qualification and VIT registration, and lower the VET in Schools teaching qualification requirement – by three levels – is perplexing to say the least. Far from a decision based on pedagogical research, it is suspected that this development was more so a ‘quick fix’ or ‘work around’ in response to the dearth of university qualified VET in Schools teachers (p. 6). Questions can also be asked about whether for example a VET Engineering teacher employed to teach VET in Schools and who has a Certificate IV qualification might have any legal part to play in teaching in a school-based STEM program initiative as their status as a teacher outside of teaching VET in Schools remains unclear.

With VET facing questions about its credibility, and with young people facing a world of increasing complexities, it hardly seems the appropriate time to reduce or minimise the educational knowledge and skills required by VET in Schools teachers.

It is becoming apparent to educators working in secondary schools that as staff from the VET in Schools area retire or move away they are becoming very difficult to replace. This suggests that the education system is not keeping up with the demand in this area, however, this shortage of well qualified VET in Schools teachers is anecdotal and lacking in empirical evidence. As such, there is a need for more research in this area. This small-scale study begins to investigate the current state of affairs by asking: what are the enablers and blockers in the participation of VET in Schools teachers in university-based teacher education?
Methods

This small-scale study was designed to identify issues and conduct a stocktake of university-based teacher education for VET in Schools (VETiS) teachers. The design of this study has three tiers. The first tier involved conducting a web-based survey. The second tier involved conducting telephone and email interviews with an academic staff member from each faculty across Australia offering a university-based teacher education program. The third tier identified and flagged some examples of innovative practices associated with the provision of teacher education programs for VET in Schools teachers.

The key research question used to guide this study was: *what are the enablers and blockers in the participation of VET in Schools teachers in university-based teacher education?*

Four sub-questions were used to expand on the key research question. These were:

1. What university-based teacher education is currently provided for VET in Schools teachers?
2. What are the difficulties in designing and providing university-based teacher education for VET in Schools teachers?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the design and provision of university-based teacher education programs for VET in Schools teachers across Australia?
4. Are there any creative and innovative curriculum, pedagogical or assessment practices in these VET in Schools teacher education programs?

The study investigated university-based professional teacher education. Tier one was designed to investigate stakeholder perceptions and involved the conducting of a national web-based survey of stakeholders associated with VET in Schools teachers. The survey was designed to begin identifying enablers and blockers. It used web-based Qualtrics software, and survey data was analysed using frequency tables. Emails were sent out in an effort to recruit a wide range of stakeholders. While the response rate (n=17) was considered quite low, it gained rich responses from a range of stakeholders. Among the respondents were: managers within state Curriculum Authorities; a VET in Schools consultant; secondary school Principals; Vice- Principals; School-based VET in Schools Program
coordinators; TAFE Program Co-ordinators; VET in Schools teachers; and some university-based VET teacher educators.

This survey data was complimented through semi-structured telephone interviews with a purposive sample of university-based faculty leadership and teacher educators to ascertain their perspective on the appropriateness and adequacy of VET in Schools teacher qualifications and professional learning (n1 = 29). Each phone interview took approximately fifteen minutes. Extensive notes were taken and this data was thematically analysed.

This tier provided a stocktake of the provision of university-based teacher education for VET in Schools. Additional data was drawn from the analysis of curriculum documents and semi-structured interviews and/or follow up email correspondence with a leading teacher educator from each faculty and lecturing staff from providers of VET in Schools teacher education. The data obtained from the curriculum analysis and these semi-structured interviews were used to determine the content, scope, enrolment numbers, staffing and mode of provision arrangements along with some specific state governance requirements. Following the semi-structured interviews with lecturing staff within VET in Schools teacher education, participants were asked to explain and discuss any creative and innovative practices within these programs. Finally three vignettes were presented as part of the third and final tier of the study.
Findings

Findings from the web-based questionnaire

While only 17 responded to the survey they were representative of all eight state and territories of Australia, with just over a third of respondents being from Victoria (see Appendix A for survey instrument). The respondents represented a wide range of interested stakeholders with some being VET in Schools teachers, school-based VET Program coordinators, TAFE Program coordinators, a school Principal, a Vice Principal, TAFE teachers working in VET in Schools, a Curriculum manager for VET in Schools, and a VET consultant. The others were university-based Education Program Coordinators and University lecturers who work in Education faculties.

When asked to state what they believed to be the minimum qualification requirement for a VET in Schools teacher, most stated that it was a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, a qualification in the trade or qualification being taught, and currency in the occupational area. Others stated that they thought that VET in Schools teachers had to have a teaching diploma or degree, a trade qualification, along with teacher registration. One suggested that they had to have state-based teacher registration or permission from the registration authorities to teach—known as ‘permission to teach’. This is a temporary permission that is intended for those who do not yet have a teacher qualification but who are working towards getting qualified. It was also reported that VET in Schools can be taught by teachers with experience of the job but who are without qualifications in education or training and assessment, however those working under this provision are unable to assess students, and are required to be supervised by a qualified teacher or a teacher with a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

When asked to identify and describe challenges in the provision of VET in Schools teacher education, respondents cited:

• Getting university recognition of trade qualifications and experience for the purposes of entry and/or credit into a degree program;

• The complex dual requirement to understand both the trade context and needs in industry along with an understanding of young people, how they learn and their learning needs and priorities:
• A general misunderstanding by teachers in secondary VET programs on the principles of competency-based training and assessment and the requirement that students need to prove competency;

• There is a perception by employers that the quality of the training through VET in Schools programs is sub-standard;

• The requirement for VET in Schools teachers to understand and maintain their currency. This includes getting release back into industry as part of satisfying the currency requirements.

• The inclusion of a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as part of an undergraduate degree adds substantial additional costs to the students and/or the university provider;

• Mature age skilled tradespeople need to commit time and finances to undertake further study in order to become qualified as a VET in Schools teacher;

• Conformity to current AITSL standards and regulations make it increasingly difficult to include VET in Schools as a method area;

• Small and even medium sized teacher education programs are limited in the number of method areas and specialisations that they can offer to remain cost effective.

The survey questionnaire asked participants whether they knew of any existing university-based teacher education programs for VET in Schools teachers such as a VET method subject option. Most respondents gave a negative response with some saying ‘not any more’ as the programs that they used to know of had, in recent years, closed down. Others reported Charles Sturt University, La Trobe University and the University of Tasmania. These programs were reported to have some limitations as they ‘piggyback’ onto the preparation programs of secondary Technology teachers.

The questionnaire provided statements that had a Likert scale, offering respondents the option to: ‘Strongly agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Unsure’, ‘Disagree’ or ‘Strongly disagree’. Of the 17 respondents 88 per cent (15) either Strongly agreed or Agreed that ‘the need to have a trade background to teach VET in Schools is very different to the usual recruits into teacher education’. Two disagreed with the statement. When asked whether ‘giving advanced standing in an undergraduate degree for a trade/VET qualification is difficult to justify’, 10 respondents Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed, while seven Agreed. Fourteen Strongly agreed or Agreed that ‘teacher education programs for VET in Schools must be specially designed for pre-service teachers with a trade background’, while three Disagreed.
In the next item on the survey, 14 participants Strongly agreed or Agreed that ‘experienced practitioners working in their trades will not be able to attend full time university studies’, and again, three Disagreed. Sixteen Agreed that the teacher education classes to train VET in Schools teachers would need to be held at a time when employed tradespeople could attend; with one respondent Disagreeing. When asked whether the levels of literacy, numeracy and computer skills of this intended cohort may be quite different to usual entrants into teacher education programs, 13 Strongly agreed or Agreed, while 4 disagreed.

Finally, when asked whether having teachers on staff in a school who have experience as tradespeople would enrich secondary schools and had the potential to open options to students, one Disagreed, but nine Strongly agreed and seven Agreed.

Findings from the interviews and email correspondences

Participants were recruited from faculties and Schools of Education around the country who provided teacher education programs. A list of the appropriate universities was obtained from the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) website. Participants were academic staff, such as Program Coordinators selected on the basis of their knowledge of program offerings or knowledge of VET teacher education. The objective was to conduct a stocktake and document offerings of VET as a method option within teacher education, and to identify teacher education programs that specifically trained VET in Schools teachers. Representatives of 38 higher education institutions that offered teacher education were contacted. Some declined to participate with responses being obtained from 29 institutes.

In particular, participants were asked if their university offered VET as a method subject for their secondary teachers and/or whether they offered any form of teacher education to train VET in Schools teachers. They were asked if they had considered offering teacher education to VET in Schools teachers and on what basis they had decided to offer, or not offer, training in this field (see Appendix B for interview questions).
New South Wales Responses

Ten universities across New South Wales participated in the interviews. None offered VET as a method subject within their teacher education programs. One offered teacher education for entrants who were entering with trade qualifications that would allow them to teach in the Technology learning area. Seven of the institutions had considered offering VET teacher education and one had not. Two did not know if they had considered it, as they were quite new to these universities and to their positions. However, a subject designed for Technology teachers about VET in Schools and Industry was found to be offered in an institution by one of the participants who reported not knowing if it had been considered. Of the seven who had considered offering VET within their teacher education programs, one said that it had never progressed any further than being considered. Others said that there were many barriers, and yet others said that they had considered and even offered it in the past but that it had since been discontinued.

Among the strongest barriers to offering teacher education for VET in Schools, was the issue of viability. The larger Schools of Education had comprehensive offerings of method areas, while smaller Schools needed to be selective about their offerings. Another consideration was the need to match offerings to staff expertise. Not enough demand was another reason for not offering VET in Schools as a method area. In the past, students with VET backgrounds coming into teacher education were supported financially and with structured training opportunities (Guthrie, 2010; Pitard & Greenfield, 2011-2012). Other schools reported having offered VET in the past but that they had been ‘spread too thin’, and forced to rationalise their offerings. Some said that in the past they had piggybacked VET with adult education but that in more recent years, adult education had ‘dried up’ and along with it, the VET area. One reported that while they did not offer VET in Schools as a subject now, when they had offered it in the past, their VET in Schools pre-service teachers had been quickly ‘snapped up’ and employed prior to graduation— often as a result of their professional placements. Some said that their experience of trying to get VET in Schools teacher education up and running had ‘just been too difficult’.

Queensland Responses

Of the seven institutes who participated in the study from Queensland, none offer VET as a method or specialist subject for pre-service teachers. Four of these institutes had investigated the possibility of introducing VET as a method area, and two of those interviewed were in the process of discussing the possibility of introducing it. One of the institute’s interviewed had previously offered VET as a method area, but have since
discontinued. This institute continues to offer credit to Bachelor of Education students entering the course with a trade qualification, and although they do not offer VET as a method area per se, they believe that they ‘cover the requirements’ of VET in Schools teaching by combining it with home economics and industrial technology design discipline areas. The same institute also offers a senior curriculum course that requires students to unpack training packages and teach VET in Schools. This institute has been considering the prospect of ‘reinvigorating’ a vocational teacher pathway within their Bachelor of Education course or as a new degree for industry trainers and teachers. Of those that had previously investigated the possibility of introducing VET as a method area, the primary reason for not introducing it was because of a lack of students wanting to do it. In other words, to offer VET as a method area would be simply unviable. Other reasons for not offering VET included:

- Regulatory constraints experienced by Education departments. Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) accreditation want specialisation subjects to be in the areas of curriculum, and technical education ‘gets all mixed up’ into other areas such as manual arts, and technology and design. Also, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) ‘make it tough’. In response to such difficulties, the one institute that had in the past offered VET as a method area abandoned it from the course during a reaccreditation process;

- Disincentives for tradespeople to return to study, and a belief that tradespeople will not want to leave their job and return to study for reasons including family and finance;

- Queensland is about to change the qualification requirement of a teacher from a Graduate Diploma to Master of Teaching. This shift will create an even bigger obstacle for tradespeople considering a return to study;

- Lack of resources such as workshops and other facilities;

- The requirement to have teacher registration to teach VET in Schools has been removed.

**Victorian Responses**

Eight universities in Victoria were contacted, and of these, seven participated in the study. Four of the seven reported having VET offerings within their teacher education program and one had a specific VET in Schools and Technology teacher education program. Interestingly, Victoria has two senior secondary certificates—the Victorian Certificate of
Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). The VCAL can be completed at one of three levels, Foundation, Intermediate and Senior. Satisfactory completion of a VET program is a requirement of the Intermediate and Senior levels of the VCAL. The VET requirement within VCAL may provide a reason as to why this state has more universities offering teacher education for VET in Schools.

Of the four offering VET teacher education to their secondary pre-service teachers, all four were being offered at the Masters level (i.e. AQF Level IX). Entry to Masters level programs requires pre-service student teachers to have an appropriate undergraduate qualification for subject specialisation. One of the universities explained what they called an ‘indirect relationship’ between subject specialisation and teaching VET in Schools. Under this arrangement undergraduate specialisations as developed through completion of degree programs (in areas such as Information Technology, Engineering, Science, Arts, Nursing, and Business) were being piggybacked upon and used as the basis for pre-service teachers being considered ready and able to teach VET in Schools. Currency or experience in the job associated with the qualification being offered were of less importance.

It is also possible that some Masters level students have completed a VET qualification and then an undergraduate degree prior to entering the Master’s program. Three universities also reported offering a VET in Schools teaching subject at undergraduate level, and one of these was within a piggyback course in the Technology learning area.

One participant from a university not providing any VET in Schools opportunities within their programs reported that their suggestions to explore this option had been met with indifference by other members of their faculty. Another participant said that ‘they were just starting out’ and were concentrating on getting the core offerings right, and as such, VET as a method area was not being considered. Among the difficulties reported in providing these options were viability and class size, so while some programs appeared to offer VET in Schools options on paper, not all of these were necessarily running each year.

Responses combined for South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Northern Territory (NT)

There were five participants from this cluster of states and territories. One offered VET teacher education generally and for VET in Schools. This program piggybacked with the technology field, and so in order to qualify as VET in Schools teachers, students’ trade areas were required to correspond to a learning area in the Australian curriculum. While this program reported having some 400 students enrolled around the country, the respondent explained that in the confines of the university, they avoid
using the term ‘VET’, and for strategic reasons, instead opt for the more generic notion of ‘applied learning’.

The other four respondents did not offer any VET subjects within their teacher education programs. One said that they only had small offerings so far and so VET in Schools was ‘not on their radar’. Another reported that they once offered a VET option when they used to offer courses in adult education. Another said that they used to offer it, recalling that the schools in low SES areas have a high demand for VET in Schools teachers, while schools in other areas ‘won’t touch them’. This respondent also reported remembering that all of their pre-service teachers enrolled in the VET in Schools method area used to get jobs. Yet another explained that while they do not offer VET as a method area any more, they had once partnered with the local TAFE to provide this option, but that this had been discontinued as had the option of students obtaining a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment within their teacher education programs. This too was explained as becoming ‘too difficult’.

Vignettes of teacher education for VET in Schools teachers

**Bachelor of Education (Applied Learning) at the University of Tasmania**

In order that teachers be eligible for registration on graduation, the program has to be designed to be accredited under the new AITSL
standards and regulations. As such, the degree is of four years duration and includes a mixture of general education and more specialist subjects. The general subjects are shared with pre-service teachers in other, often larger, secondary teacher education programs being offered by the faculty. Many of the students entering the course receive credit for their vocational experience, vocational qualifications, currency in their trade, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, and the Diploma of VET Practice. As TAFE teachers and VET trainers do not need teacher registration, after graduation there is also a sister course run in the Faculty of three years’ duration. This is the Bachelor of Adult and Applied Learning (BAAL). This also shares subjects with the Bachelor of Education (Applied Learning).

The four year Bachelor of Education (Applied Learning) consists of 32 subjects, or 32 units, and offers teaching specialisations in VET in Schools and (appropriately related) Materials, Design and Technology (MDT). The course is not intended for students transitioning from Year 12, but rather, students with experience and qualifications in a trade. Many of the students in this course are TAFE teachers from Tasmania and other states across the country who are gaining a teaching degree, albeit one that will give them teacher registration and therefore also allow them to teach VET in Schools and Design and Technologies studies in secondary schools. The course is offered fully online with the three full-time staff running online tutorials and support sessions in the evenings, after work hours, and on weekends. This program currently graduates approximately 200 students per year.

Bachelor of Technology Education at La Trobe University

On paper this is a four year AITSL accredited secondary teacher education program but in reality, it is a two year teaching degree of sixteen subjects as it restricts entry to those with a VET qualification and extensive experience in an occupational area (e.g. a trade) that aligns with one of the teaching contexts in the Australian curriculum for Design and Technologies. Entry to the course requires the completion of a relevant trade along with eight years of trade industrial experience. Candidates’ trade qualifications and experience take the place of the disciplinary specialism, and as such, gives participants credit for the first two years of a four year teaching degree. This course does not take entrants from Year 12 as they do not have the necessary industrial experience and trade or VET qualifications. The course can be undertaken full-time or part-time with classes offered as blended learning, with intensive face-to-face classes held on weekends. The Bachelor of Technology Education currently graduates approximately twenty-five students per year.
Four other University teacher education programs that include VET as an option

Four other universities that offer access to some form of teacher education for VET in Schools include Charles Sturt University, Monash University, Victoria University and University of Southern Queensland. A program leader at Charles Sturt University reported that they offered their secondary students the opportunity to become VET in Schools teachers, and again, that this was restricted to those intending to become Technology teachers. A Program leader at Monash University reported that they offered a subject in their Bachelor of Education and in their Master of Teaching courses that involved teaching ‘VET and VCAL in schools’. Likewise it was reported that an option existed within teacher education at Victoria University for pre-service teacher students to do a VET in Schools method subject, however enrolment numbers were so low that the subject was not financially viable. At Deakin University pre-service teachers can undertake subjects that are quite closely related to VET within a Master of Applied Learning.

Other related options

Southern Cross University offers a subject related to VET in Schools and industry, but which is not meant to be a VET method subject. At the University of Southern Queensland some of their pre-service teachers will be teaching VET IN SCHOOLS when they get employed as teachers after graduation, although this usually occurs in tandem with their teaching specialist areas of manual arts, computing, business, and catering. While teaching VET in Schools is considered as an integrated option to their related method areas, their teacher education program is not intended to provide VET as a method area. As some of these pre-service teachers already have appropriate backgrounds, experience and VET qualifications, they are also able to undertake the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.
Conclusion

The study found that six of the 29 universities that participated in the study and who run university-based teacher education programs across Australia, offer teacher education in some form to VET in Schools teachers. While most secondary schools need VET in Schools teachers, some schools find people with suitable backgrounds to become VET in Schools teachers difficult to recruit. Others reported that people with suitable and appropriate backgrounds were reluctant to enrol into the existing teacher education programs on offer. Trade and VET qualified individuals with extensive industry experience are often mature age and somewhat older than the usual cohort within teacher education programs. They often have established family and financial commitments and frequently unable or unwilling to endure the upheaval and change of lifestyle associated with a return to study.

At the very least, such students need to gain advanced standing for their existing VET qualifications and industry experience, and be offered truncated degree programs. This may be hard for some within universities to approve as they are constantly struggling to defend the quality and integrity of their institute’s programs.

By definition, prospective VET in Schools teachers are considered non-traditional learners by universities as they sit outside the two dominant pathways into teacher education. Master level programs, with the prerequisite of an undergraduate degree, are found to be less appropriate for this cohort, and as such, institutes will continue to struggle to reach the enrolment numbers and class sizes that would make VET method offerings economically viable to run. Yet with some 240,000 students enrolled in VET in Schools across the country, it is worth considering whether all pre-service secondary teachers should be offered subjects that would allow them to build their understanding of VET in Schools.

The most successful VET in Schools teacher education programs are those that are offered to entrants with a correspondence between their trade qualification and an area in the Australian curriculum. The most common of these are those programs that piggyback teacher education for VET in Schools with training as Technology teachers. However this is only a partial solution as the focus of some VET in Schools programs (for example, hairdressing) remain unrelated to a technology curriculum area or any learning area in the Australian curriculum.
References


Labour Organisation; Employment Policy Department, Skills and Employability Branch.


Appendices

Appendix A: University-based teacher education for VET in Schools (VETiS) teachers: online survey

Q1 - What University, school or training organisation do you work for, and where are you located?

Q2 - What state or territory do you work in?

Q3 - Can you tell me a little about who you are, and what you do?

Q4 - Can you tell me what qualifications VET in Schools teachers need for registration in your State or Territory?

Q5 - What are the challenges around the provision of teacher education for VET in Schools teachers?

Q6 - Do you know any current examples of teacher education for VET in Schools teachers that you would describe as good practice?

Q6a - In response to your previous answer regarding good practice and teacher education for VET in Schools teachers: At what University/RTO? Why do you think it’s good?

Q7 - Does your Faculty/School of Education do any teacher education for VET in Schools such as offer VET as a method area? *If yes, please provide an answer (including the name of the institution) in text box below.

Q8 - Who might be someone we could speak to in your Faculty or School about teacher education for VET in Schools?
Q9 - To your knowledge, does anyone offer teacher education for the VET sector in your Faculty/School of Education?

Q9a - In response to your previous answer, who would this be?

Q10 - Who is the Program Leader for Teacher Education for Secondary Teachers in your Faculty/School of Education?

Q11 - Who is the overall Program Leader in your Faculty/School for Teacher Education?

Q12 - With regards to offering teacher education for VET in Schools to pre-service teachers, to what extent do you think that:

1. The need to have a trade background to teach VET in Schools is very different to the usual recruits into teacher education
2. Giving Advanced standing in an undergraduate degree for a trade/VET qualification is hard to justify
3. Teacher education programs for VET in Schools must be specially designed (tailored) for pre-service teachers with a trade background
4. Experienced practitioners working in their trades will not be able to attend full time university studies
5. The classes in a teacher education program for VET in Schools teachers will need to be offered at a time when employed tradespeople can attend
6. The levels of literacy, numeracy and computer skills of this cohort may be quite different to usual entrants into teacher education programs
7. Having teachers on staff in a school who have experience as tradespeople will enrich secondary schools and open up options to students

Q13 - Who might I get in touch with in your State or Territory to find out the registration requirements for VET in Schools teachers?

Q14 - Could you provide the names of Principals or Assistant Principals of any (senior) secondary schools who run large VET in Schools programs who I could
contact and ask about the need for teacher education for VET in Schools programs? * If yes, please provide the names of their schools as well.

Q15 - Does anyone in your Faculty/School do research on VET or VET in Schools that you know of?

Q15a - In response to your previous answer, please provide their name(s)/details below.

Q16 - Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. If you would like to add any further comments, please enter them here.
Appendix B: Interview schedule for the semi-structured interviews

The three core questions that were put to the representatives of the different Schools and Faculties of Education that offered teacher education across Australia were:

1. Does your University offer VET as a method area for secondary school teachers (and if yes, who teaches it)?

2. If you don’t offer VET as a method area, have you ever investigated the idea of providing it, especially to VET in Schools?

3. If you have considered offering it (or stopped offering it) what was the basis for the decision?