

Briefings

Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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NATIONALLY RECOGNISED TRAINING IN SCHOOLS: Equipping school students with industry relevant skills

Foreword

The independent schooling sector in Queensland is known for its diverse range of schools and for placing student choice at the heart of educational enterprise. It isn't surprising therefore, to see marked increases in the number of independent school students capitalising on the opportunities available to them by participating in vocational education programs.

With 84% of ISQ's secondary schools reporting student enrolments in 287 singular nationally recognised training qualifications in 2023, it is clear schools are embracing vocational education and training (VET) opportunities that equip young learners with the skills and knowledge needed by Australia's workforce sectors. With 24% of these schools registered as training organisations themselves, there is a continued focus on providing effective suites of available education that not only enhance the learning development of our students but also heighten their ability to achieve success post-school.

Whether a school offers VET as a pathway for its senior learners or not, an understanding of the significant role it plays in bettering the educational journeys our students experience whilst contributing to the success of Australia's key industries is imperative.

This article discusses current and emerging skills shortages and the contribution vocational education and training delivered in schools makes to relieving workforce gaps. As the skills acquired and retained by our students comes under close scrutiny once they enter the workplace, this paper also highlights some of the perceptions of key stakeholders, the benefits and challenges currently experienced in Queensland's independent schools and opportunities for engagement being provided for senior students.



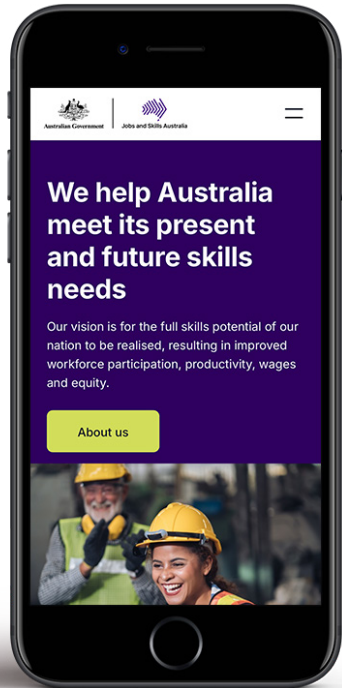
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NATIONALLY RECOGNISED TRAINING IN SCHOOLS:
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Skills Shortages

The latest Skills Priority List (SPL) released by Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), shows that 36% of occupations assessed are in national shortage with industry sectors striving to find persons with suitable skills required to do the job. These include both employability skills and working experience.

The economic impact of the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the need to essentially ‘grow our own’. By educating and equipping school students with industry sector skills, schools can help to lesson labour market shortages whilst enabling unique career opportunities for their students.

The completion of VET qualifications enables learners to access many higher education pathways. Assisting students, apprentices and trainees to complete their nationally recognised training, therefore, sets more Queenslanders up for success in the workforce and contributes to a stronger economy.

In a recent address to VET practitioners in the Northern Territory (2024), Independent Schools Australia stated: “VET for secondary students is an integral part of secondary education and training and can play a key role in facilitating school-to-work transitions and broadening students’ opportunities and skills in vocational pathways.”

Valuing Vocational Education and Training Pathways

A number of reviews commissioned by both the federal and state governments have been conducted over the past five years focusing on the value of vocational education and training in schools.

The parliamentary inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training, Shared Vision, Equal Pathways (2024) states: “There is compelling evidence that schools must do more to promote VET to students. This includes providing relevant, accessible, consistent information on VET and associated careers and promoting VET and university as equally valid post-school options” (p. xxxv).

In contrast to graded curriculum assessment, VET is competency based, aligning with specific and progressive skill levels as required by industry. Training packages and their associated qualifications and units of competency have been written by industry for industry and are regularly updated to ensure training and assessment reflects current skills needs.

For some schools, VET programs are sometimes used more generally to encourage students to stay in school or better engage those who are less academically inclined. As this focus is heavily weighted around ‘student engagement’ there is a risk to the perception influencers have on the value of VET careers, seeing them as ‘low-value’ or ‘less prestigious’.

FIGURE 1: AUSTRALIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (AQF)

SCHOOL	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	UNIVERSITY	AQF LEVEL
		Doctoral Degree	10
		Masters Degree	9
VET qualifications are delivered up to AQF Level 8	Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate Bachelor Honours Degree		8
	Bachelor Degree		7
	Associate Degree Advanced Diploma		6
	Diploma		5
	Certificate IV		4
	Certificate III		3
Senior Secondary Certificate of Education	Certificate II		2
	Certificate I		1

This contradicts the view of industry groups whose focus is on employing highly capable and motivated school-leavers who bring with them strong industry, foundation and employability skills worthy of VET-related careers.

The parliamentary inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training, Shared Vision, Equal Pathways (2024) also states: “The over-reliance on the ATAR as a primary indicator of success contributes to the false perception that VET is inferior to university and to false markets in education which focus neither on actual career opportunities nor employers’ needs. Moreover, the focus on the ATAR often leads to schools allocating students perceived as less academically gifted to under-valued and under-resourced VET streams, while those perceived as more intelligent or academically inclined are moved into streams focused on higher education. This is often done with little regard to a student’s interests, aptitudes, or career aspiration. This can have a variety of potential negative impacts, including an increase in the number of students who attend university only to drop out, an increase in the number of university graduates who will have difficulty finding employment, and fewer qualified VET graduates available to respond

to current and emerging skill and workforce shortages” (p. 88).

Vocational pathways are guided by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) which sets an educational structure comprising 10 levels (Figure 1).

Schools commonly deliver qualifications at Certificate I and II levels although Certificate III qualifications have also become increasingly popular. Not only does the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) now recognise the achievement of Certificate III level qualifications and above when calculating Australian Tertiary Admissions Ranking (ATAR) scores, but more and more schools also acknowledge this level as the ‘skills standard’ required for many entry level professions.

The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) also acknowledges and provides core credit for Certificate IV level qualifications

although, when scheduled as part of a traditional curriculum timetable in Years 11 and 12, this proves difficult for schools to find the sufficient ‘amount of training’ time required to satisfy this level of training.

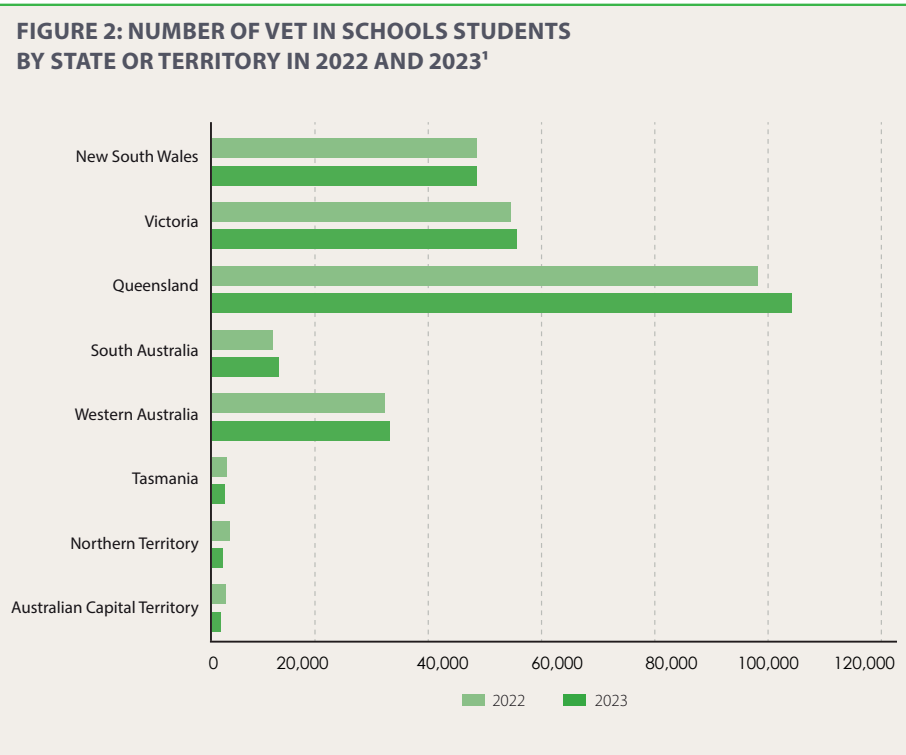
The Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work (2020) states: “VET delivered to secondary students is subject to the same regulatory frameworks and requirements as VET delivered in other settings. It must comply with national standards so that it is delivered, assessed and certified under the same set of conditions as VET undertaken by non-secondary students. VET is VET” (p. 82).

Additionally, whilst some independent schools provide access to Diploma level qualifications for complementary QCE credit, Universities and RTOs commonly deliver programs across levels 5 to 8 post-school.

“VET for secondary students is an integral part of secondary education and training and can play a key role in facilitating school-to-work transitions and broadening students’ opportunities and skills in vocational pathways.”

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AUSTRALIA (2024)

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When providing advice to school students regarding ‘pathways’, students are best prepared when equipped with an awareness and understanding of the industry they intend to enter, the various roles, current and emerging, required by that industry and the AQF level of skills and knowledge they need to acquire to successfully gain employment.

Whilst the nation’s skills shortages have not bypassed the schooling sector, schools who value VET tend to engage dedicated persons to co-ordinate and manage their VET programs. For effective coordination to take place, persons in these roles must have a strong knowledge of VET pathways,

including early career counselling, and be able to sufficiently assess student needs and interests and their suitability for specific VET programs.

ISQ offers partial funding support for approved school practitioners in guidance roles to achieve a Certificate IV in Career Development qualification. ISQ’s Member Schools may access the Expression of Interest form available on the ISQ Member Hub.

VET in Schools Participation and Expertise

Queensland continues to maintain the highest number of VET in Schools participants, with independent schools seeing a 12.72% increase in VET participation in 2023 compared to a national increase of 6.77%.

Comparatively, Queensland’s government schools have shown a 5.12% increase compared to a national increase of 2.78% and its Catholic schools a 5.57% increase compared to 3.46% nationally. Whilst there is a marked increase in VET participation across Queensland’s schools, the most notable increases are within its independent schooling sector².

An increase of VET participation in schools has meant an increase in demand for suitably qualified VET trainers. As such, schools have sought ways to expand the teaching portfolios of their teachers to include competency-based vocational education programs.

In March 2024, new legislation was released recognising schoolteacher credentials. Through the Standards for RTOs, this legislation now enables schoolteachers to become fully qualified VET trainers through the achievement of a single Training and Assessment skill set comprising either three or five targeted units of competency³.

This opportunity has significantly increased the uptake of skill set enrolments however, a requirement to maintain quality skills and knowledge in line with the current occupational requirements of industry remains. Given that VET is primarily based on representing current industry skills and knowledge, the need for school teachers to hold the same nationally recognised skills and knowledge, be that through accreditation or experience or a combination of the two, is not likely to change.

ISQ offers partial funding support for approved schoolteachers from its member schools to obtain either the full Certificate IV in Training and Assessment or the five-unit VET Delivered to School Students Teacher Enhancement skill set. Schoolteachers may apply for the following programs using the Expression of Interest forms on the ISQ Member Hub:

- TAE Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (qualification).
- TAE VET Delivered to School Students Teacher Enhancement (skill set).

How vocational programs are offered in schools

Queensland is home to over 250 school RTOs, 43 of whom are members of ISQ. As such, it has its own regulatory authority in the QCAA. This means that, whilst school RTOs are registered with the National VET Regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), the registration and regulation duties for most are assigned to the QCAA as its delegate. School RTOs manage their own scopes of registered qualifications, the number of which depends upon the size of their student cohorts and, of course, their resources and capacity to deliver.

Schools who are not RTOs, or school RTOs who cannot expand their scopes of registration to include some qualifications, engage the services of external RTOs.

Should schools enter into partnership arrangements with external providers the school’s duty of care to those students continues and an understanding of the regulatory obligations the registered providers have to the school’s students is essential.

In a recent scoping study into VET Delivered to Secondary School Students, ASQA states: “When schools are operating within these constraints but are unaware of the requirements

and implications of not providing adequate training, a mutually agreeable but, potentially, non-compliant arrangement may emerge” (p. 29)⁴.

Some providers might be prepared to compromise training quality by reducing the amount of training to meet the timetabling and budgetary constraints of the school. While unduly short training also occurs in the broader VET sector it has the potential for greater impact on school-aged students as they are a cohort more likely to have limited industry experience and require training of a longer duration within a recommended range.

Considering the views of parents, students and key VET sector stakeholders

In May 2024, the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) released the Good Jobs, Great Training, Queensland Skills Strategy, 2024–2028. This strategy anticipates that nine out of 10 new jobs in Queensland will require post-school qualifications over the 10 years to 2033.

Interestingly, prior to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Expert Review of Australia’s Vocational Education and Training System (2019) was conducted, and lead by the Honourable Steven Joyce. This review states: “Industry groups emphasised the importance of secondary school VET pathways in attracting people towards VET careers and encouraging them to pursue further training after school. They see VET in schools as an opportunity for young people to take the first step towards a vocationally based career” (p. 95).

Highlighting the importance of skills development in school students, this initiated further research into the issues, perceptions and feedback of

EXAMPLES OF VET QUALIFICATIONS UNDERTAKEN BY STUDENTS IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN 2023:

- Accounting and Bookkeeping
- Animal Care
- Agriculture
- Automotive Electrical Technology
- Aviation
- Conservation and Ecosystem Management
- Commercial Cookery
- Construction
- Creative Industries
- Dental Assisting
- Early Childhood Education and Care
- Electrotechnology
- Engineering
- Entrepreneurship and New Business
- Fashion Design
- Financial Literacy
- Floristry
- Hairdressing
- Health Support Services
- Horticulture
- Hospitality
- Information Technology
- Justice Studies
- Laboratory Skills
- Leadership and Management
- Legal Services
- Live Production and Technical Services
- Manufacturing
- Marine Habitat Conservation and Restoration
- Nursing
- Outdoor Leadership
- Racing
- Real Estate Practice
- Retail, Resources and Infrastructure
- Sampling and Measurement
- School Based Education Support
- Sport Coaching
- Tourism
- Veterinary Nursing

1 VET in Schools 2023, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, July 2024
2 VET in Schools 2023, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, July 2024; NCVER Data Builder, August 2024
3 Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015. (2024, March). Australian Government Federal Register of Legislation

4 <https://www.asqa.gov.au/how-we-regulate/strategic-reviews/past/vet-schools>

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- those key to the VET sector. In 2021, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) who are the professional body responsible for collecting, managing, analysing and communicating research and statistics on the Australian vocational education and training sector, embarked on a review into VET for Secondary School Students based primarily on feedback from students and their parents.
- Of the students surveyed:
- 41.1% planned to achieve an ATAR on completion of Year 12, and 68.4% of these intended to count their VET studies towards their ATAR.
 - 77.5% indicated that they had 'always wanted to learn the skills and knowledge' in the course they had chosen, followed by 52.8% saying 'I want to get a job in this industry'.
 - 59.7% described their aspiration for their final year of schooling as being 'to complete Year 12 and obtain their Senior Secondary Certificate of Education (SSCE)', while for 27.7% it was 'to achieve an ATAR'.
 - 60.6% described their post-school aspirations in undertaking further education or training.
- Of the parents surveyed:
- 79% had encouraged their child to enrol in a VET course while at school.
 - 75.1% reported that a benefit for their child undertaking a VET course was 'to get a qualification'.
 - 47.6% wanted their child 'to complete Year 12 and achieve their SSCE' in the final year of schooling.
 - 30.6% wanted their child 'to achieve an ATAR'.
 - 70.7% wanted their child to go on to further education or training.
- More recently, tertiary education providers have been working with industry and vocational providers to devise ways of aligning the two systems to enable students to acquire the skills and knowledge required for high level professions and trades.
- The Australian Universities Accord – Final Report was released in February 2024 and states: "Growth in higher education needs to be paired with similar growth in vocational education and training, which will be an essential part of Australia's skills mix into the future. Where possible, the Review – and this Report – focuses on tertiary education, seeing higher education and VET as two important parts of the same system, each bringing different strengths" (p. 1).

Engaging School Students with Industry Experiences

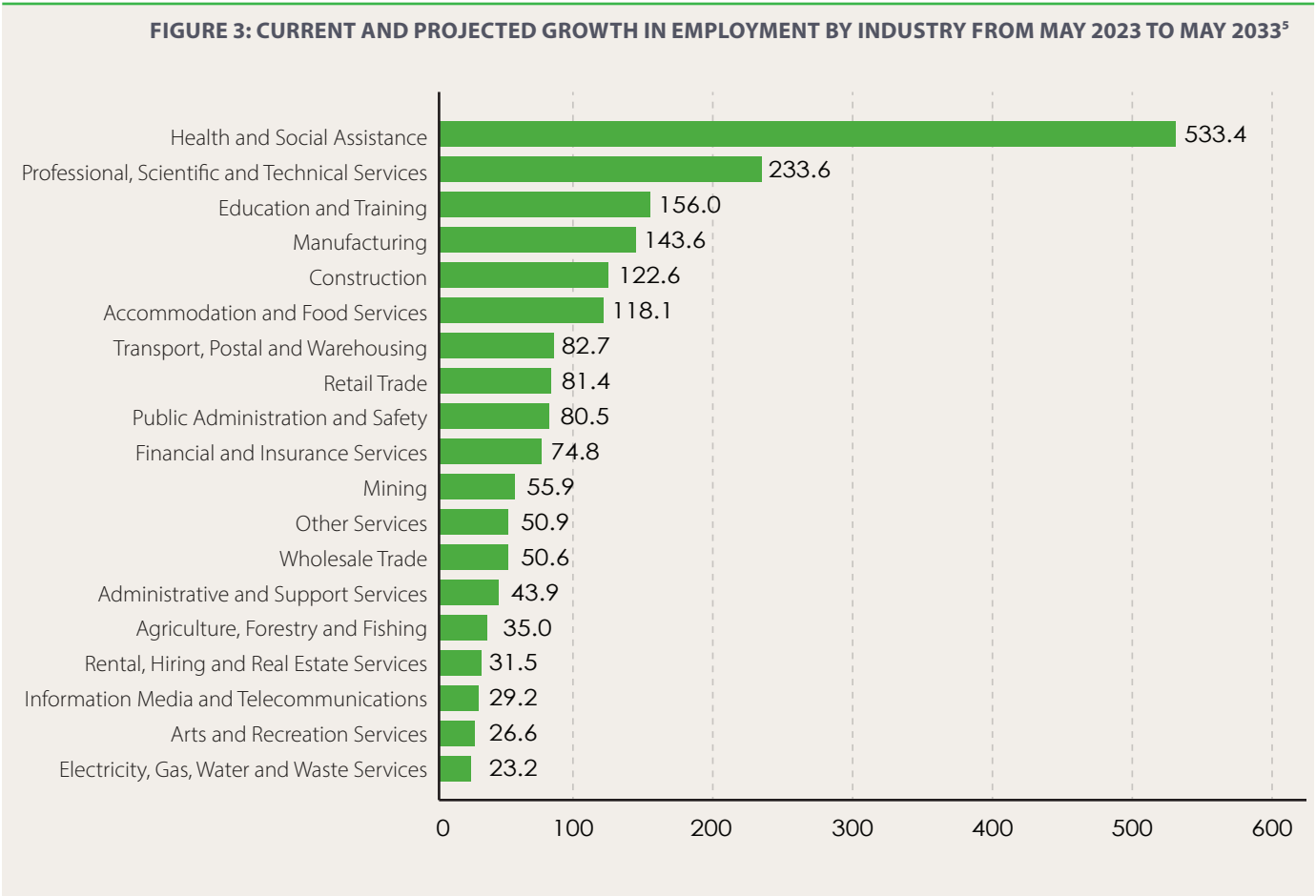
Figure 3 shows the current and projected growth in employment by industry from May 2023 to May 2033.

Whilst Australia suffers from a shortage of essential industry skills, these employment 'gaps' also present a range of wonderful opportunities for our current senior student cohorts and beyond. It is therefore becoming increasingly essential for schools to build relationships with employers so they may create opportunities such as work experience placements for students whilst enrolled in school.

Enabling students to engage with industry whilst in school provides them with insights into the world of work along with exposure to the more personable, transferable, employability skills required of employees irrespective of their chosen industry field(s). In 2023, independent schools reported 4,761 students having undertaken work experience with 58% of students engaging in Year 10.

ISQ provides information and guidance in accordance with the work experience procedures and requirements of the Department of Education (DoE) for its member schools which can be accessed via ISQ's Member Hub.

Additionally, DESBT fund a number of Gateway to Industry Schools Programs (GISP). These are unique to Queensland and represent 12 industry sectors.



Each program provider helps to build partnerships between schools and industry where participating students are exposed to a range of learning experiences that assist their career choices and pathways to employment.

In 2023, 121 independent schools in Queensland partnered with GISP providers through a funded MOU arrangement to engage with supportive programs offered to schools. These represented a 40% increase in the number of schools engaged in 2022.

To learn more about the Gateway programs, schools can visit DESBT's website [here](#).

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships

School-based apprenticeship and traineeship pathways enable school students to undertake vocational study whilst engaging in 'on-the-job' work for part of their school timetable. This work forms part of their direct industry relevant training enabling them to develop their skills and knowledge whilst studying for a nationally recognised qualification. Notably, 2023 saw a 6% increase in apprenticeships in independent schools and a 12% increase in traineeships from 2022.

ISQ also provides the following funding initiatives to support schools in enabling their students to engage with both vocational study programs and apprenticeship opportunities:

- VET Activity Funding supports schools with students actively participating in VET programs.
- VET Seed Funding is provided to schools per student upon commencement of a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship and aims to increase participation specifically targeted to industry priorities.

Schools may access further information on the above funding programs via ISQ's Member Hub.

"Growth in higher education needs to be paired with similar growth in vocational education and training, which will be an essential part of Australia's skills mix into the future."

AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES ACCORD – FINAL REPORT (FEBRUARY 2024)

5 Australian Universities Accord – Final Report, February 2024

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Conclusion

With a national focus on ‘growing our own’ skills, devising and implementing new strategies for pathways enabling a successful transition from school to further education, higher education, or direct employment has never been more crucial. As Australia experiences what has been deemed to be ‘critical’ skills shortages, the role of the school practitioner, be they in a position of decision-making, influence or support, is key.

Whilst our young people may indeed enter the workforce with occupational credentials, schools would benefit from considering the voice of employers who feel that, in many cases, some students are not bringing with them the aligned industry and employability skills required to sufficiently fulfill the job role.

Australia has rich opportunities embedded within its vocational education system in that it provides a robust framework of progressive, nationally recognised skills and

knowledge that align with industry needs. As such, VET plays an essential role when considering the solutions to our skills shortage issue. It also plays a crucial role in the success that many young learners achieve post school therefore, the value that schools place on this system, on the interests, the learning needs, and post school goals of our students, and on the ‘call’ from industry who need to fulfil both current and emerging roles and tasks, is an important component of the education service we provide.

Available Support

ISQ’s Vocational Education Services Advisor is available to assist Member Schools in understanding the opportunities that are possible for your students and provide:

- Professional learning e.g., workshops, webinars and in school support.
- Regular VET in Schools Focus Area Updates issued to registered VET practitioners within ISQ’s member schools.

- School RTO reviews conducted on request.
- Assessment validation events organised between schools or directly with ISQ.
- Accredited training opportunities for teachers wishing to become VET trainers and for those school practitioners seeking to become certified in career development.
- Incentive funding for schools enrolling students in VET programs and school-based apprenticeships or traineeships.
- Information and guidance supporting work experience undertaken in Queensland including insurance cover for students.

Further information to assist a school’s understanding of VET, School-based apprenticeships and traineeships, VET Funding, support for School RTOs and work experience can be found on ISQ’s Member Hub. Alternatively, ISQ’s Member Schools may contact the Vocational Education Services Advisor vet@isq.qld.edu.au.

Image: Photo courtesy of The Trade School



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