

Vocations: the link between post-compulsory education and the labour market



This summary brings together the relevant key findings for tertiary education providers and school educators from the research program *Vocations: the link between post-compulsory education and the labour market*. The program comprised three different strands:

- pathways from VET in Schools
- pathways within and between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education
- pathways in the labour market.

Current VET qualifications are based on competency-based training, which assumes a direct link between qualifications and jobs. However, past research shows that this is often not the case. This research explores the notion of 'vocational streams', which could potentially provide a better frame of reference for shaping the evolution of qualifications and jobs. Education and training in vocational capabilities, rather than in specific occupational tasks, could possibly result in a more sustainable and adaptable workforce.

What are vocational streams?

Traditionally the link between qualifications and jobs has developed from the notion that vocations are based on specific skill sets. This tends to prepare students for a narrowly defined occupation or a particular job. A modern concept of vocations, called 'vocational streams' provides a framework for creating better connections between qualifications and jobs.

Vocational streams help individuals to be more adaptable by instilling the basic knowledge required for a number of jobs within a broad vocational field of practice, rather than for a specific occupation. This research suggests that the implementation of vocational streams would prepare individuals for potentially rewarding working lives, while improving their options for career advancement through specialisation and the flexibility to move sideways into related occupations.

Why is this research important to tertiary education providers and school educators?

The research found that vocational streams could potentially provide a better frame of reference for shaping the evolution of qualifications and jobs. The most effective and enduring way to build vocational streams is by creating clear and widely recognised occupational pathways within broad fields of practice. This level of education and training reform has implications for pathways.

A more differentiated approach to educational pathways is needed, one that goes beyond linear pathways in the various fields of education. Each qualification pathway should reflect the way that graduates use qualifications to build their careers and while all qualifications will serve different roles they will vary in emphasis. These roles are:

**what the
research
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'Vocational streams' develop work-related capabilities that share common underpinning knowledge, skills and practices, rather than remaining focused on specific workplace tasks and roles that are based on existing or past practices.

- labour market entry or progression
- access to higher-level studies
- widening participation for disadvantaged students.

The research suggests that the curriculum and pedagogy of tertiary education institutions, and their broad approach to each qualification, should reflect the different roles qualifications play. However, while tertiary education institutions are clearly central to a new approach to qualifications, their role is limited. The proposed new approach to linking qualifications and jobs through vocational streams will require and be most effective when it is undertaken collaboratively by the tertiary education sector with its social partners – employers, unions and government.

Key implications for school educators

- Sustainable models of VET in Schools would identify and incorporate vocational streams in the senior school curriculum to enable students to study subjects related to their proposed vocational field of practice.
- There are two key challenges for sustainable models of VET in Schools: to provide high-quality and authentic workplace learning experiences; and to enable access to accurate and timely career advice.

Key implications for tertiary education providers and educators

Educational institutions, along with the employers, unions, professional associations, occupational and accrediting bodies and government who share common objectives, should be supported to collaborate to:

- focus on workforce-development strategies, including occupational pathways and qualifications to underpin those pathways
- be tasked with identifying particular vocational streams and their underpinning knowledge, skills and attributes
- build trust in the qualifications used within vocational fields

Noting that any change challenges the bounds of competency-based approaches to training packages, key implications for tertiary education providers and educators include:

- Curriculum needs to emphasise the different roles of qualifications, and could be based on the broad-ranging knowledge, skills and attributes needed for a number of occupations within an industry. This can be done by moving from a sole focus on specific workplace tasks and roles, to including the development of a person's theoretical knowledge, technical skills and attributes in a broad field of practice.
- Educators and researchers are encouraged to learn more about the operation and structure of the different labour markets in which their graduates enter and progress. This knowledge may then be used to further vocational capabilities and the concept of vocational streams, and potentially be used as a structuring principle when redeveloping qualifications.
- Those qualifications whose main role is to prepare graduates for further study could emphasise educational development, while those qualifications which aim to prepare graduates for an occupation could concentrate on broad occupational outcomes.

For more information

This work is based on the three-year research program *Vocations: the link between post-compulsory education and the labour market*. The research was conducted by a consortium led by the LH Martin Institute at the University of Melbourne. For more information, see the final report, *Linking qualifications and the labour market through capabilities and vocational streams*, available at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2782.html>>, and the research summaries for government and policy-makers; industry; and qualification and approval bodies; available at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2793.html>>.



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