

# CTE DOWN UNDER

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BY SUSAN REESE

In 1992, the governments of Australia made a landmark decision to work together on a national approach to career and technical education (CTE), known in Australia as vocational education and training (VET), and to firmly establish industry leadership for key aspects of the VET system. In June of 1993, the Council of Australian Governments merged a number of ministerial councils resulting in the formation of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

VET continues to undergo changes in

Australia, just as CTE does in the United States. To incorporate early childhood development into the early childhood schools system, MCEETYA was taken over this year in July by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs.

The Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE), also replaced the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education to facilitate students' seamless transition from studying VET subjects to entering higher education.

### Leading the Way

The peak intergovernmental forum in Australia is the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), which is comprised of the prime minister, state premiers, territory chief ministers and the president of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). Its role is to initiate, develop and monitor the implementation of policy reforms that are of national significance and which require cooperative action by Australian governments—including education reform.

As the decision-making body for VET in Australia, MCTEE has overall respon-

sibility for VET as part of the national postsecondary (or tertiary, as it is called in Australia) education and employment system and has the following key functions:

- Setting the national priorities and strategic policy directions for the tertiary education sector to meet the skill needs of the Australian economy.
- Establishing streamlined arrangements for national consistency and harmonization of the VET and higher education sectors.
- Allocations under the National Training System Funding Pool.
- Maintaining strong industry leadership of and engagement in the tertiary sector.
- Overseeing the work of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Council in strengthening the AQF.
- Engaging with all associated bodies, councils and ministerial companies to ensure the effectiveness of policy and strategies for the tertiary sector.
- Responding to business, industry and stakeholder advice on issues impacting on the tertiary sector.
- Setting national research priorities.

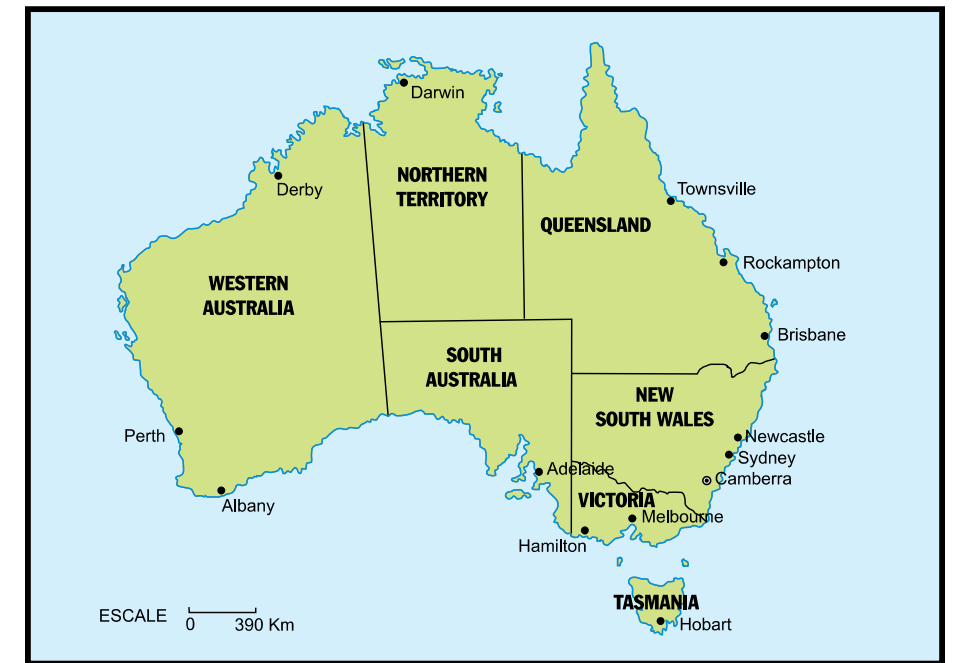


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### Common Issues, Common Goals

A recent report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a forum of 30 democracies that includes both Australia and the United States, notes, "Australia has a very well-developed VET system, which enjoys a high degree of confidence." The report, "Learning for Jobs: OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training," finds that the engagement of employers is strong; the national qualification system is well established and understood; the system is flexible; and the data and research on most VET issues are good.

Like the United States, Australia has certain challenges to be met in the 21st century, such as a baby boomer generation nearing retirement. Australia is also a country with different state and territory governments in addition to a national government. So the following two challenges cited in the OECD report about Australia may have a familiar ring to career and technical educators in the United States, "Despite a common national qualifications system, there are wide variations in the assessment standards which are applied," and, "The workforce

of VET trainers in training providers is ageing." In Australia as in many other OECD countries, notes the report, attracting and retaining good VET trainers and teachers is a challenge.

In the United States, we measure progress through means such as industry standards and certifications, state and federal standards, and accountability mandated by legislation such as No Child Left Behind. OECD notes that industry is actively involved in VET policymaking and in the development of standards and delivery, and there is a commitment by the national training system to train to competency and standards defined by industry.

The Productivity Agenda Working Group was formed to oversee the development of a National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development and VET-related National Partnerships. The Agreement identifies the long-term objectives of the commonwealth, state and territory governments in the areas of skill and workforce development, and affirms the commitment of all governments to work in partnership, and with businesses and industry, to develop the skills of the

### Hands-on Training

The Australian Qualifications Framework is a unified system of national qualifications in schools, VET and the higher education sector, from senior secondary certificates through doctoral degrees. The framework links together all these qualifications and is a quality-assured national system of educational recognition that promotes lifelong learning and a seamless and diverse education and training system. Within the framework, there are eight VET qualifications available: Certificates I, II, III and IV; Diploma; Advanced Diploma; Vocational Graduate Certificate; and Vocational Graduate Diploma.



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Australian people. It also recognizes that the centerpiece to achieving this is a shared commitment of all governments to a national training system that is responsive to local needs and delivers high-quality, and nationally consistent training outcomes.

The outcomes contained within the Agreement are ambitious, and the targets are long term—extending to the year 2020. The Australian governments expect to make substantive progress toward these outcomes and targets over the life of the Agreement; however, they also recognize that to ensure these outcomes and targets are met over the long term, all governments will need to renegotiate their contributions in future iterations of the Agreement. COAG also has an agreement to fund specific projects and to facilitate and/or reward states that deliver on nationally significant reforms. The National Partnership Agreement on Productivity Places Program will contribute to meeting the objectives and outcomes

identified in the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development.

The National Audit and Registration Agency (NARA), the National Quality Council (NQC), and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Australia are also involved in providing a national framework for the Australian VET system. NARA manages the audit and registration of multi-jurisdictional training organizations. NQC is an MCVTE committee that oversees quality assurance and ensures national consistency in the application of the AQF standards for the audit and registration of training providers. TVET Australia provides the national training system with support and services that include learning assessment materials and nationally endorsed training packages.

Another addition to the national workforce landscape in recent years is Skills Australia. Established in March 2008, this independent statutory body was set up to provide advice to the Australian

government on current, emerging and future workforce needs.

Australian VET also includes a distance learning component. The Australian Flexible Learning Framework is the VET system's e-learning strategy. It was launched by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG) to allow VET practitioners and training providers working in e-learning to connect with colleagues in Australia, as well as internationally.

Australian VET includes terms that sometimes parallel our own—for example, “learning pathway,” which is defined as “a path or sequence of learning that can be followed to obtain competencies or qualifications.” “Skill ecosystem” may not sound familiar at first, but the definition is “clusters of high, intermediate and low-level skills in a particular region or industry.” A “training package” is “an integrated set of nationally endorsed standards, guidelines and qualifications for training, assessing and recognizing people’s skills, developed by industry to meet the training needs of an industry or group of industries.”

### Funding VET

For CTE in the United States, federal funding, especially through Perkins, is important for its success, and in Australia, funding at the national level of government appears to be recognized as necessary as well. While the Commonwealth of Australia contributes significant funding to the VET system nationally—under current funding arrangements agreed to by COAG, it provides an estimated \$6.7 billion from January 2009 to 2012-2013—state and territory governments are responsible for the administration and operation of their respective training systems. This includes all matters relating to Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses, staffing and facilities. The Australian government is strongly supportive of the role of VET and recognizes the importance of TAFE in providing the highly skilled workforce

necessary to support Australia’s economic prosperity. The government contributes about a third of the costs to VET nationally, with the bulk of this funding directed to public training providers.

### Hands-on Training

The Trade Training Centres in Schools Program commenced in 2008 and is an important element of the Australian government’s education revolution. It will provide \$2.5 billion over 10 years to enable all secondary schools to apply for funding of between \$500,000 and \$1.5 million for Trade Training Centres. Under the program, schools will have an opportunity to apply for funding to build new, or upgrade existing, trade or VET facilities.

Trade Training Centres are intended to help increase the proportion of students completing high school or an equivalent qualification, as well as helping to address skill shortages in traditional trades and emerging industries. An important step toward achieving these goals is to ensure that students have access to high-quality, relevant education and training opportunities that continue to engage them and encourage them to complete their studies. More than \$90 million was awarded in the first phase of round one of the program, and in phase two more than \$335 million was announced. Up to \$387 million will be available in round two of the program.

In May 2009, the Australian Government confirmed its commitment of \$33.7 million for 5,500 additional pre-vocational training and support places in (and enhancements to) the Australian Apprenticeships Access Program, bringing the total number of places for 2009-2010 to 15,000. The Access Program targets vulnerable job seekers who have barriers to skilled employment. The additional investment will enhance and expand the Access Program to include extra places for vulnerable young people and workers made redundant through the global

recession. In July 2009, the Australian government announced further expansion of the program to support the training of 2,000 home insulation installers into long-term careers, as part of the Green Skills package.

**The bottom line is that when there is a national commitment to include high-quality education and training for 21st century skills, students have a greater chance for success.**

Relevant principles and guidelines state that vocational education and training should be included as VET in Schools if it is undertaken as part of a senior secondary certificate and its completion by the student provides credit toward a recognized VET qualification within the AQF. Australia’s School-based Apprenticeships program allows students to be part-time employees and full-time students subject to the same employment and training requirements as those required in other Australian apprenticeships. Australian School-based Apprenticeships provide the opportunity for young people to gain VET qualifications and undertake employment while also completing a senior secondary certificate.

Another VET in Schools program is Structured Workplace Learning, which is a course component within a real or simulated workplace, providing supervised learning activities that, in most cases, contribute to an assessment of competency and achievement of outcomes relevant to the requirements of a particular Training Package or other AQF VET qualification.

### Worldwide Success

VET in Australia may face the same image battle as CTE does in the United States, since the Australian Government’s Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Web site for high school students acknowledges that most parents encourage their children to take math, science and English courses in preparation for entering a university, but it recognizes that some students may prefer to learn on the job. And just as we have found that CTE can keep such students engaged in learning, research in Australia shows that VET subjects (or modules) taken at school and continued at Registered Training Organizations such as TAFE are more likely to improve students’ chances of getting the job they want.

Whether you call it CTE or VET, the bottom line is that when there is a national commitment to include high-quality education and training for 21st century skills, students have a greater chance for success—and the country will have the workforce it needs for the future. **I**

### Further Exploration Down Under

To learn more about career and technical education in Australia, here are some Web sites to explore.

Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations  
[www.deewr.gov.au](http://www.deewr.gov.au)

Training Packages @ Work  
[www.tpatwork.com](http://www.tpatwork.com)

Australian Council for Private Education and Training  
[www.acpet.edu.au](http://www.acpet.edu.au)

Learning for Jobs: OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training in Australia  
[www.oecd.org/dataoecd/27/11/41631383.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/27/11/41631383.pdf)

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