

***“That's an ever expanding pool” –  
mapping partnerships for VET at  
Australian secondary schools***

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**Dr Gosia Klatt**

Senior Lecturer, Centre for Vocational and Educational Pathways  
The University of Melbourne

- Growing emphasis on developing good practice models of cooperation in education in Australia, the UK, US, Canada
- Social partnerships are “significant policy trend” and are “driving particular styles of working and resourcing education” Seddon, T., Billett, S., & Clemans, A. (2004)
- New pressures on schools lead to “destabilisation and reconfiguration” of traditional learning spaces Wheelahan & Moody (2011)
- Require a coherent policy and established practices based on long lasting principles (Clemans et al 2005)

## **ARC Linkage Innovative partnerships for youth engagement in education and work, the University of Melbourne and Deakin University**

### Research objectives:

- Limited research documenting what challenges are faced by partnerships between schools and external partners
- Increasing number of school partnerships (e.g. more than 65,000 students in NSW involved in SWL)
- Focus on understanding partnerships between schools and workplaces/external learning providers

- Targeted all secondary schools (State, Catholic and Independent) in **VIC, NSW and SA** in 2015
- **Interviews** - 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with school principals, teachers and program coordinators
- **Focus groups** - 30 focus group meetings with 134 students conducted
- **On-line questionnaire** – over 200 schools
- **Five themes:** rationale; resources; implementation; benefits; challenges

## **Learning for work and engagement at secondary school**

- **VET in Schools (VETiS)** – programs that involve the delivery of Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualifications by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).
- **Applied Learning** - experiential, hands-on, active learning which provides practical, work-related experience, and other skills that are important for life and work
- **Flexible Learning** – Flexible school and/or community based learning programs, which may include individual case management.

- There is a wide range of partnership practices
- Of significant benefit to Australian students
- Established for different purposes and in a variety of contexts
- Four principal motivations in the formation of partnerships arrangements in the senior secondary years of schooling

Four types of rationales are listed below:

**Rationale Type 1:** Delivering VET Programs

**Rationale Type 2:** Providing Structured Work-Placements

**Rationale Type 3:** Taking a Whole of Community Approach

**Rationale Type 4:** Ensuring Access and Equity.

# Rationale Type 1: Delivering VET Programs

- *It's a very, very large sourcing of organisations providing the training so at any one time I think we're dealing with up to 12 to 15 RTOs for the classes and then all the ones for the school based apprenticeships on top of that (VET coordinator VIC).*
- *The VET provision is incredibly complex given the shared facilities and the Trade Training Centre consortium and other schools actually using that facility, so that's really, really tightly put together (School Principal VIC).*
- *At the moment anyone working in VET area, especially if they're in a lead school for a Trade Training Centre, has got an enormous job on their hands. It's very difficult work keeping all of the mix in play. Very difficult work (VET and RTO Coordinator VIC).*

# Rationale Type 1: Delivering VET Programs

**Reported Benefits:** increasing student engagement and retention in the senior years of schooling through:

- The provision of a broader curriculum offering to *“give the guys options for what takes their fancy”* (VET coordinator VIC)
- Catering for students interests such as, working with children or animals, construction or hospitality; and considered “easier” to study

# Rationale Type 2: Providing Structured Work-Placements

- Industry and local businesses:  
*“almost an ever expanding pool” (School Principal VIC)*
- *School SWL databases, job carnivals,*
- *Industry coordinators, SWL coordinator roles, or a formal industry board*
- required constant attention:  
*“You've got to keep your employers on board. That takes a lot of work. You've got to be so careful with them. You've got to nurture them.” (VET and RTO Coordinator VIC).*

## Rationale Type 2: Providing Structured Work-Placements

**Reported Benefits:** enabled students to “*get a head start*”, “*taste*” the industry, personal development,

*“made you grow up quicker”*

*“We leave with the qualification. If they fail over there they’ve got nothing”*

- highly positive picture of student experiences
- developing a variety of skills

*“We do work across all environments, we work outside, inside, domestic, we do some commercial work and we do solar and data”*

## Rationale Type 2: Providing Structured Work-Placements

### **Reported Benefits:** industry representatives

*“You can mould them...those 16 years old they are not fixed yet on what they want, what they like you can help them forming their ‘professional self’. We help then mould their ‘professional self’.”*

*“Confidence is the benefit. You look at those kids when they start with all the heads down and look at them at the end of Year 12, full of confidence, they are all set up.”*

# Rationale Type 3: Taking a Whole of Community Approach

Partnerships with community organisations:  
development of *“good rounded young people”*  
*“lifelong learners”*, and *“community citizens”*  
*Organising local community events, walkathons,*  
*BBQs etc.*

- *Fundraising for Red Cross etc.*
- *Repairing, constructing and building*

## Rationale Type 3: Taking a Whole of Community Approach

**Reported Benefits:** students' increased self-esteem and sense of belonging; strengthened communication skills; and the building of students' aspirations.

*“Our class project at the moment, we're raising money to send stuff over in shipping containers to send to Timor Leste for underprivileged class and stuff; instead of just writing about it, so we've been out doing events, fundraisers and stuff to try and get money to fund everything.”*

# Rationale Type 4: Ensuring Access and Equity

Highly disadvantaged communities with large enrolments of kids from low-SES, refugee or indigenous backgrounds

*“We push towards VET and partnerships to solve the problems of our kids of socio-economic status”*

*“A lot of these kids get exposed to illegal activity. Some live on the street. The school is their only place of security and warmth and nurturing”*

*“The earlier you get them understanding the system of work the better for these kids.” (VET coordinator NSW)*

# Rationale Type 4: Ensuring Access and Equity

**Reported Benefits:** ‘linking social capital’ - leverage a wider range of resources than are available in their school - engaged youth workers, engagement officers etc.

*“It's given me a lot more social skills and able to be more open with the public and stuff. Be able to talk instead of just (sitting) quietly away in the corner”*

*“because of the VCAL program, it's helped me gain more confidence to talk to others”*

- Formation and maintenance of partnerships
- The quality of external provision (staff turnover, unpredictability of the offer and lack of communication)
- Lack of placements, schools compete for SLWs
- Lack of funding for extra staff
- Timetabling - school structures not adjusted to VET provision

- changing nature of secondary school programs
- number of factors, including:
  - ✓ The school's philosophy for selecting VET offerings.
  - ✓ The quality of the external VET providers.
  - ✓ The availability of a solid network of employers and a quality of their involvement with schools.
  - ✓ Good relationships with community representatives and other schools.
  - ✓ The resources available.

1. Idea of “choice” - VET courses selected on basis of student choice “*or what takes their fancy*”
  - student has adequate knowledge of course pathways, career possibilities and opportunities ?
  - a coherent program relevant to local work placements and career planning
2. “Easier” nature of curriculum
  - “hands on” learning style
  - Students to self-assess
  - Place for “powerful knowledge”?
3. Industry involvement
  - no long-term, formalised partnerships
  - Schools overburdened with finding placements
  - Connecting curriculum and work placement?