

5.0 Curriculum

A robust and relevant curriculum framework provides the basis for a sound secondary education system for students in the Northern Territory.

Secondary students in the Northern Territory study subjects under the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) up to Year 10 and the Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE) is offered to students in Years 11 & 12. In addition to the NTCE, Kormilda College also offers the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program for students in the senior years.

5.1 Submissions

The recommendations in the Secondary Education Report on curriculum are included in Chapters 4 and 10.

We have received submissions which made comments on the recommendations on curriculum. A substantial number of submissions reflect positively on Vocational Education Training (VET) and hands-on learning. Submissions reflect on the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework and the definition of success. Assessment and reporting were discussed in a number of submissions.

The list of submissions appears in Appendix II.

5.2 Community Discussion

5.2.1 Redefining success

Everyone agrees with the principle to broaden the definition of success. The community agrees with the Report that success is still largely confined to academic achievement, to a student gaining a successful Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) for entrance to a university even though less than 30% of Territory students go on to tertiary education (s50). This raises questions about the strong focus of a number of secondary schools towards university entrance in the NTCE.

There is a degree of expectation, by students, parents and schools (most noticeably in the Darwin region) that achieving the NTCE is the ultimate objective and benchmark for measuring a student's success.

One representative from Darwin High School commented during a community discussion that, while the concept of introducing more VET subjects into high school was a good idea, the fact remains that a lot of parents have high expectations for their children and only consider them successful if they complete their NTCE and go to university.

There is a lingering perception that non-academic learning, such as VET, school-based apprenticeships or other forms of 'hands-on' learning, are not considered a formal 'education'. Despite widespread acknowledgement and acceptance of the importance of these forms of education and training, recognition of success is still often confined to the academic arena.

This was recognised by the community as a national issue. The question arising from the community discussion is how to enable a shift in thinking by the community about the relative value that it places on what it considers as 'education' and whether a distinction between 'education' and 'training' is important.

So, how does the community define success? Submissions received provided us with a long list of suggestions on how success can be defined. They range from academic success to sporting achievements to recognition of 'life skills' such as interpersonal and communication skills and whether a young person has initiative and self-esteem. In this sense, the community, as a whole, has a big part to play. Communities need to acknowledge the complex environment that young people are in, the roles that they can play and the different contributions that they can make to society. To paraphrase a comment made at the Katherine Education Discussion Forum – our workforce is not all academically oriented. We need to place the same value on both academic and non-academic achievements.

5.2.2 Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Issues around Vocational Education and Training (VET) have generated a lot of interest, particularly among students and industry representatives. Interestingly, there are regional variations in the responses from the community on VET. This may relate to the different expectations that the community has of their students. In areas outside of Darwin, responses from the Education Discussion Forums overwhelmingly supported the idea that the students in the NT will benefit from increased access to hands-on learning and VET.

Teachers around the Territory have responded with a degree of enthusiasm in support of more VET in schools and see merit in providing students with a curriculum that is relevant to their interests and needs. In fact, there was consensus that VET is important for students' pathways and the debate should be focused on how it could be expanded.

Students' Perspective

Outside the Darwin region, students who spoke at the Education Discussion Forums or submitted comments are overwhelmingly in support of VET. VET is not seen by students as a 'poor cousin' or inferior to the NTCE academic subjects. In many cases it is considered as an 'enhancement' to their studies in school. Others regard VET as a relevant and important education in its own right. It is perceived as an important interface between education and employment.

A student at the Alice Springs Education Discussion Forum spoke about the relevance of VET to both academically oriented and non-academically oriented students. Students see it as a way to broaden their knowledge base and they want to see more VET subject choices offered to them.

VET also becomes relevant for older students who may wish to re-engage with the secondary education system at a later stage in life, often when they are much more aware of the skills and technical competencies that are required.

In Darwin, the results are somewhat mixed. While it was felt that students can benefit from increased access to VET, there were some reservations among the community, particularly parents, on whether VET should be retained in the curriculum.

Schools' Perspective

We have heard from some schools outside the Darwin region that students are providing the evidence for the absolute support for VET. One respondent in Alice Springs commented that up to 90% of Year 11 secondary students in Alice Springs at any point in time will be engaged in one or more VET subjects.

VET is welcomed as a pathway for students. While VET is seen as a positive way to engage students in learning, the concern of some schools is that there is not enough funding to keep subjects running in some areas. There are also concerns about whether there is enough expertise on the ground to deliver the VET programs appropriately and sufficient support to assist VET coordinators. Timetabling of subjects has meant that some students have found it difficult to access VET subjects offered outside their schools.

A different set of concerns about VET is raised in remote Indigenous communities. Their concerns are about the erratic and unpredictable nature of funding for VET (under the TRY model) and the lack of expertise to deliver the programs on the ground.

There have been community discussions about how VET is valued in the NT secondary education system. While some are keen to look at ways to integrate VET into mainstream offerings to students, others are reserved about whether it should be included as part of the compulsory curriculum because of a perception that VET should not be part of a conventional education. A submission from DEET Curriculum Services Branch identified that both the NTCF and the NTCE have a degree of flexibility which allows schools to integrate VET into their curriculum.

Employers' Perspective

We have received little formal feedback from employers or industry groups during the consultation process, although some industry representatives joined in the Phase One information sessions in Darwin and Palmerston. It is not clear how many were involved in discussions with their local school community during Phase Two.

Nevertheless, during our discussions with communities, we have heard from one representative who works closely with industries in the Katherine region that many industries are willing to take young people on for work if they have the appropriate level of training. It was felt that the training provided by some Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) was not relevant to the jobs that were offered by industries in the region. If education or training leads young people to employment, there may be greater opportunities for industries to work with RTOs to tailor programs and bridge the existing gap.

Other community comments

Overall, the community sees great opportunities to expand VET in the Northern Territory. While some members of the community have reservations about how more VET could be included in the mainstream curriculum framework, many others have adopted a much more innovative attitude towards VET. This includes looking at offering VET to students in earlier years of secondary as well as different models of integrating programs such as school-based apprenticeships and enterprise education to deliver learnings that are appropriate to students' needs. Some community representatives suggest greater incentives or introducing compulsory requirements for students to encourage a higher take-up of VET in schools.

There are those in the community who still believe that VET should not belong in a conventional secondary school curriculum. They (such as s87) believe that there is a lot of rhetoric about students being job-ready but not enough emphasis is placed on improving academic outcomes.

The recent history of the introduction of more VET in schools has attracted some criticism. One respondent (s87) says that Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) have hastily responded to increasing VET in schools which has resulted in a hit-and-miss approach. This has been problematic for a very important part of the curriculum.

Quality training will require quality teachers to deliver the programs. Some sections of the community see a much greater role for employers to play in facilitating appropriate VET programs in schools as well as providing funding opportunities to support students.

5.2.3 Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF)

Representatives from school communities spoke overwhelmingly in favour of the NTCF. It is clear that there is a huge level of support for it in primary schools while the jury is still out in Years 8 – 10. Feedback is particularly strong from the primary school communities on their satisfaction with the quality and implementation of the NTCF. The most common comment relating to the NTCF is that it should not be changed and schools would like more time to familiarise themselves with it and begin to see results from it. The NTCF is due for revision in 2005.

We have received comments in relation to the implementation of the NTCF. DEET felt that uptake of the NTCF has been slower than expected. The DEET CSB submission states that improved uptake would significantly assist in the provision of more relevant learning experiences. The Department has driven professional development associated with the implementation of the NTCF. Some schools agree that the current curriculum can go a long way to meeting students' needs. The issues for them are resourcing and support to implement the NTCF. They assert that they feel hamstrung by the lack of support. There are suggestions for more incentives for teachers, such as time allocation, to implement the NTCF (s47).

5.2.4 Assessment

We have received very mixed views on issues around assessment, particularly in reference to the proposal to introduce MAP testing in Year 9.

Comments have predominantly come from secondary educators and departmental staff.

Supporters of this proposal including some teachers, highlight the deficiencies in the data on student performance. It was noted that there is currently no longitudinal data available beyond Year 7 MAP results. Supporters argue that MAP results will provide an indication of the Northern Territory's performance against other states and an assessment of the Territory's performance over time.

On the other hand, some teachers maintain that there is no need to introduce Year 9 MAP testing because, as teaching professionals, they have a good understanding of the needs and performance of their students. This is reflected in students' reports and additional testing is unnecessary. Comparisons or benchmarking against other states and territories was regarded as irrelevant.

There were concerns about how data collected will be used. The community, including teaching professionals and parents, is suspicious of the possibility that more data could lead to the production of league tables comparing schools' performances. This issue is discussed in Chapter 8: Monitoring and Evaluating Performance.

5.2.5 Reporting

The community acknowledges that meaningful student reports are critical in informing students' pathways. Parents would like to know how their children are doing at school and teachers agree with the approach.

While there appears to be general support for this, some teaching professionals argue that the current practice provides sufficient information on students' learning outcomes and reject the need to change their reports.

Others agree that more needs to be done. However, the diversity of the population means that flexibility in reporting is needed. For instance, what is needed in a student's report may be vastly different in a remote Indigenous community from that in a large, urban environment. One submission suggests that schools should talk to parents and ask them what they would like to see in a student report.

5.3 Recommendations

The following are recommendations in the Secondary Education Report that specifically pertain to curriculum, assessment and reporting. A brief commentary has been provided for each recommendation to indicate the community's response to the recommendation.

Recommendation	Commentary
<p>6. to support the ongoing implementation of the NTCF in secondary schools NT DEET</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as part of the 2005 review of the NTCF, continue to work with teachers to refine, define and exemplify outcomes and benchmark indicators of the NTCF • as part of the 2005 review of the NTCF, revise the enterprise strand in the Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) learning area and vocational learning as a cross-curricular perspective of the NTCF, to reflect the importance of vocational, enterprise and livelihoods learning in the later middle years • provide professional development programs for effective pedagogy to support secondary teachers and other educators in the implementation of the NTCF. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is strong support for this proposal, particularly from teaching professionals. • There is a view that the NTCF should be cognisant of variations in students' learning outcomes, e.g. remote.
<p>7. to offer a more relevant and appropriate curriculum for the range of students in the senior years, NT DEET</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work with SSABSA to improve further the relevance and flexibility of the Stage 1 and Stage 2 curriculum statements to be more appropriate to the needs of Territory students • work with Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) to improve the nature, flexibility and recognition of VET courses in the senior years • expand the current range of vocational, livelihood and VET curriculum and pedagogies to occupy a greater part of the courses on offer in the senior years (Years 10 –12). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is strong support for this proposal. • Some argue that the NTCF in its current form is actually flexible enough but more needs to be done to make schools more aware of it.
<p>8. in order to improve and extend assessment and reporting practices in secondary schools, NT DEET</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide professional support to schools and precincts to improve assessment practices, using samples of work from the Evidence of Learning folders and the electronic data base, Explore NT, for school/precinct-based literacy and numeracy moderation • support teachers and other educators to analyse, interpret and evaluate assessment data for planning and reporting purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualified support was received on this recommendation. • We received mixed responses on the recommendation on Year 9 MAP testing. Some teachers commented that it sounds like a good idea but implementation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduce Year 9 MAP testing in literacy and numeracy • develop a policy and set of procedures to acknowledge learning outcomes achieved by students in the later middle years in contexts beyond the classroom • work with SSABSA, secondary schools and moderators to improve overall student performance in the NTCE • assist staff in schools and precincts to provide meaningful assessment data and reports to parents at regular intervals throughout the school year, and relevant certification on the completion of each stage of schooling. 	<p>could be very labour intensive. They question who will resource the additional load.</p>
<p>9. the NT Government, through the Minister, take up with the appropriate Ministerial Council the feasibility of a national testing regime for technacy to parallel testing for literacy and numeracy so that standards can be established for these skills; and that NT DEET undertake preliminary work in this area which may be presented at appropriate forums to bring the issue onto the national education agenda.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little comment – considered a low order priority by most. • There were concerns that this may disadvantage some students.
<p>35. to improve the delivery of vocational and enterprise learning and VET programs to all students in the Territory, NT DEET</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as part of the development of Learning Precinct strategic plans for secondary delivery, work closely with each school or precinct, to develop and enhance the provision of enterprise and vocational learning, and VET, taking into consideration alternatives provided in this report • require that learning precincts foster livelihood activities, small enterprises or work opportunities for students in cooperation and partnership with their communities • set aside funds each year to be used for enterprise establishment grants, to be allocated to enterprise development projects proposed by students, classes and schools, or learning precincts • negotiate with ANTA so there is no impediment to effective delivery of VET programs, particularly for remote precincts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principle of providing more vocational and enterprise learning and VET programs is supported. However, this support is not conditional upon the establishment of Learning Precincts. • The community wants to see more options and be involved in designing programs. • It is all about quality and choice.

5.4 Community Ideas

The community acknowledges the importance of learning that is meaningful and emphasises the need to provide students with greater subject choice that lead to different pathways. While some pathways will be academically oriented, others would require different skills and knowledge. The community sees that more can be done to help equip young people to achieve their chosen pathways.

Communities need to have greater ownership of the education system

This means that the community should be able to assist in identifying skills shortages and opportunities for young people. They can be proactive in matching the training needs to where shortages exist.

Changes in curriculum, assessment and reporting

There is general support for changes in curriculum, assessment and reporting that will bring about improvements in learning outcomes. However, changes in these areas will need to be supported by changes in teaching and this may mean more professional development for teachers.

Preparation for VET

VET is recognised as an important and relevant part of education for young people. In many cases, VET programs are targeted at students in Years 10 to 12 when students are at an age that is considered mature enough to carry work responsibilities. To address problems of disengagement with the education system at an earlier age, i.e. Years 8 to 9, the community would like to see more opportunities to provide relevant learning, possibly in the form of VET, to younger students. Some suggest offering pre-VET training, such as introducing issues of work ethics, to students in earlier years so that they could be better prepared for formal VET training at the appropriate age.