

VDC News

Level playing field – if jobs count, then VET has the numbers

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TUE 13 JUNE | VDC NEWS



But there's a mismatch between public perceptions of VET and the facts about what VET delivers

Australia is lucky to have an innovative, active organisation like [Skilling Australia Foundation](#), firmly focused as it is on the benefits VET brings to young Australians and the national economy. The Foundation is a determined advocate for VET, as is amply demonstrated by its recent report which tackles head on a series of widely held opinions that VET is junior league when it comes to tertiary education.

Perceptions are not reality: Myths, realities & the critical role of vocational education & training in Australia (30 pages) zeroes in on three myths about VET:

1. VET graduates earn low wages.
2. VET graduates struggle to find work.
3. VET is a thing of the past.

None of these is true, and with admirable ease the report debunks each of them.

VET graduates earn high wages in occupations with high demand

Take Myth #1 – VET graduates earn low wages. Here are the Foundation's countering facts:

'The median full-time income for a VET graduate is \$56,000. The median graduate salary for students completing a Bachelor's degree is \$54,000. VET graduates also have the capacity to earn higher salaries than many Bachelor degree graduates: the highest average starting salary for a VET qualification (Certificate IV in Hazardous Areas – Electrical at \$85,4006) is higher than the highest starting salary with a Bachelor-level degree (Dentistry at \$80,0007).'

The Foundation's report bowls up plentiful evidence of buoyant demand for VET graduates. Based on national survey data the Foundation's report tells us 59 per cent of Australians believe that 'in a globally competitive world we need university education more than VET.' In knocking down Myth #3 the report makes a simple case for VET:

'According to the Commonwealth Government Department of Employment, the VET sector currently provides training courses for 9 out of 10 occupations predicted to have the greatest growth of new jobs over the next five years.'

VET is riding a wave of international and industry esteem

If you are looking for sound arguments about the individual, social and economic benefits of VET, Skilling Australia Foundation has assembled them all in one place in just 30 pages. The report takes an international perspective too, showcasing the role VET plays in nations like Germany, the UK and the US. Apart from government enthusiasm for VET as a valuable social and economic policy player, industry is onside as well. Globally, the report notes:

'... there is a trend towards skills-based hiring, rather than recruitment weighted strongly towards academic qualifications. Ernst and Young (EY) in the UK have now removed degrees from their hiring criterion, like Nestlé and Barclays who are also moving to contemporary skills and strengths-based recruitment.'

This level of regard for VET is something we need to work harder to bring into public consciousness. The Foundation's CEO, Nicholas Wyman, introduces the report by saying:

'... among the Australian public, perceptions surrounding vocational education continue to be widely out of step with the reality of the sector and its achievements... public awareness and recognition of the crucial role that VET can play and is playing – in training the Australian workforce with the skills required to grasp future industry opportunities – is poor.'

It's not just in Australia we need to market the facts. *Skillset and match*, a magazine published by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, reports that 87 per cent of VET students are happy with the work-related skills they developed, yet 1 in 3 European Union citizens do not think VET leads to well-paid or highly regarded jobs.

Perhaps it's time for an international campaign to reposition VET in the public sphere as a tertiary education pathway that holds great promise for all of us.