



# Wimmera Workforce through



Vocational

Education &

Training

in

Schools

This document has been prepared by the Wimmera Southern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network on behalf of the Wimmera Development Association and its local government members: Hindmarsh Shire Council, Horsham Rural City Council, Northern Grampians Shire Council, West Wimmera Shire Council and Yarriambiack Shire Council.  
August 2015.



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## Executive Summary

Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) is designed to expand opportunities and pathways for senior secondary students. Students can gain nationally accredited qualifications in a broad range of applied learning disciplines as part of their VCE and/or VCAL studies. There are some significant challenges regarding the provision of VETiS in the Wimmera Southern Mallee.

The region faces ongoing challenges in developing sufficient human capital to enable investment, growth and innovation. Education, improving workforce skills and increasing participation in training and employment are fundamental to the region's social and economic well-being. The economy of the Wimmera Southern Mallee has declined over the past decade, and has lagged behind the rest of Victoria. Both population and productivity have fallen over this time.

There are five priority areas that principals and schools see as the main issues and barriers to the delivery of VETiS in the Wimmera Southern Mallee (WSM):

1. the cost of Vocational Education and Training courses is the most significant barrier for schools
2. the funding available to offset these costs is seen as inadequate
3. the relatively small number of students across the region creates significant challenges for schools and the VET cluster to ensure that there are sufficient numbers for the delivery of courses
4. the geographical size that the cluster covers and the time and cost imposition on students who travel
5. the difficulty of providing appropriate vocational education to learners with low literacy (including disadvantaged cohorts; CALD, Koorie and students with a disability)

Training providers are faced with the following challenges:

1. The cost of delivering VETiS is a big issue for training providers. All providers deliver the VET subjects at, or below cost. This is sometimes calculated without overheads, so the true cost is often much higher than the providers charge. The delivery of VETiS is under-funded
2. Rural students are consistently disadvantaged when an aggregated cohort cannot be achieved across the WSM cluster
3. Some students do miss out on their chosen course, depending on their course selection and the number of other students registered to do the course
4. Providers would like to enter into multi-year agreements with the schools to deliver courses, to ensure that their capital investment in staff and equipment is justified

It was widely agreed that the Wimmera Southern Mallee VET cluster is an effective, efficient vehicle to plan, promote and deliver VET in the region's schools. The ability of the cluster to deliver a wide range of VET courses will potentially be compromised through the delivery of VET in individual schools.

This report makes the following recommendations, based on the information obtained from the region's key stakeholders:

Area	Recommendation	Action
<b>Funding</b>	Increase financial support to provide all students with opportunities to do the VETiS course of their choice	Lobby state government to include the VETiS courses in the Victorian Training Guarantee (VTG) model and increase the Rural Allowance
<b>Transport</b>	PTV and DET support for travel to attend VETiS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek adjustments to the current funding guidelines for Conveyance Allowance Program (CAP)</li> <li>• Promote the availability of CAP support to all schools and families</li> </ul>
<b>VETiS Delivery</b>	Maximise the regional delivery modes of VETiS	Investigate various options for delivery of VETiS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Block release <i>i.e. school holidays</i></li> <li>• Online components</li> <li>• Common units delivered in school prior to starting course <i>i.e. White card, OH&amp;S</i></li> <li>• Combining core units across multiple disciplines</li> <li>• Pilot literacy and numeracy improvement program for VETiS / VCAL students including the CALD community</li> </ul>
<b>Program Coordination</b>	Improve administration support required by schools for the implementation of VETiS	Lobby the state government to provide funding to schools to assist with added administration costs
	Improve regional VETiS cluster coordination	Lobby the state government for funding for a regional VETiS coordinator
	Investigate timetable alignment of cluster schools	Work with the VETiS cluster schools to create a common timetable across the cluster
<b>Future</b>	Measure post-school outcomes of VETiS students	Undertake a further VETiS research project (beyond the scope of this report)
	Through curriculum design develop VET pathways in Years 7-9	Work with the DET to increase the vocational offerings for students in the middle years

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## **1. Introduction**

As the lead economic and community development organisation for the Wimmera Southern Mallee region, Wimmera Development Association is committed to supporting the region to maximise the economic benefits from education and training services.

The Wimmera Southern Mallee region incorporates the municipalities of West Wimmera, Hindmarsh, Yarriambiack, Northern Grampians and Horsham (Sections of the Buloke and Southern Grampians shires are also included for the purposes of this report).

An active Wimmera Southern Mallee Workforce Planning Committee provides advice and support for regional training and education issues, and has provided oversight of this project. Wimmera Development Association seeks to document the issues and barriers to providing Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) in the region - for students, schools and training providers. This will enable the region to make representations to relevant government agencies and regional forum for targeted interventions to address education and training issues and barriers, impacting on the growth of the region.

### **1.1 Objectives of this research project**

Workforce training is identified in both the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Plan 2010 and the Grampians Workforce Development Strategy 2012, as a key regional priority to support business growth.

The objectives of the project are to

- Identify issues and barriers for students accessing regional education and training to improve their career opportunities in the region
- Identify issues and barriers for schools to deliver VETiS
- Identify issues and barriers for training providers to deliver VETiS services in the Wimmera Southern Mallee
- Quantify these issues and barriers in terms of
  - Costs
  - Government policies and funding criteria
  - Unmet demand for training
- Develop quantitative and qualitative evidence to support regional advocacy for increased VETiS participation

## **2. Data collection and analysis**

### **2.1 Methodology**

Data for this project has been captured from a wide range of sources. The project seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- a) Provide a regional overview of VET pathways to employment
- b) Document current regional VETiS programs, including
  - Training/contracting arrangements
  - Participant numbers and trends
  - Sector analysis
  - Cluster issues
  - Logistical issues raised e.g. transport
- c) Analysis and recommendations for regional discussion
- d) Interviews of key stakeholders in the region included
  - Federation University
  - Longerenong College
  - Skillinvest
  - Wimmera HUB
  - Wimmera LLENs/North Central LLENs
  - Department of Education and Training (DET) officers
  - Regional Secondary and P-12 College Principals and VET Coordinators
  - Local Principals' network – Grampians region of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals (VASSP)

### **2.2 Primary data**

Primary data was sourced through the following means:

- Interviews with school principals and the Chair and Secretary of the Victorian Association of Secondary School Principals (VASSP - Wimmera region)
- Interview with Regional Senior Advisor for South-Western Victoria DET region
- Interviews with school VET cluster representatives
- Interview with the Wimmera Southern Mallee VET Cluster Coordinator
- Interviews with local Registered Training Organisation heads
- Interviews with key stakeholders

The interview, survey and questions are documented in Appendices 1 and 2.

The survey results are supported by the interview responses, indicating a high degree of reliability.

### **2.3 Secondary data**

Documentary, survey and multiple source secondary data were used to inform the research project.

Literature and information for the review were referenced from the following sources:

- 2015 VET Review
- 2015 LLEN VET submission
- 2015 WSM Cluster VETis Handbook
- Department of Education and Training (DET) VET information
- Department of Education and Training (DET) Training report
- Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority data sets



### 3. Orientation and background

#### Section 3 summary

- VET in Schools (VETiS) is designed to expand opportunities and pathways for senior secondary students
- Students can gain nationally accredited qualifications in a broad range of applied learning disciplines as part of their VCE and/or VCAL studies
- VETiS can be delivered by schools themselves (where they are also registered as training providers and auspice assessment through appropriate RTOs), or commissioning a TAFE or registered training organisation (RTO) to deliver the training
- The Wimmera Southern Mallee region covers an area of 33,943 km<sup>2</sup>
- The economy of the Wimmera Southern Mallee declined over the past decade, and has lagged behind the rest of Victoria. Both population and productivity have fallen over this time
- The region faces ongoing challenges related to human capital development (improving workforce skills, increasing participation in training and employment), to enable investment, growth and innovation

#### 3.1 VETiS

'VET in Schools (VETiS) is designed to expand opportunities and pathways for senior secondary students, and improve educational outcomes in line with the Victorian Government's objective to increase the number of young people completing Year 12 or equivalent. VETiS also addresses the skills and employment needs of industry in Victoria' (DET 2013).

'Introduced in 1994, VETiS comprises nationally recognised VET certificates undertaken by secondary school students as part of their Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). VETiS provides a vocationally oriented program of studies leading to a senior secondary certificate. VETiS programs are typically delivered through partnership between schools, industry and Registered Training Organisations, and often include opportunities for students to participate in structured workplace learning' (DET 2013).

In Victoria in 2014, there were 50,628 students from 605 schools/senior secondary providers undertaking 70,357 VET certificates. These students were enrolled in 320 unique VET courses provided by 403 RTOs (VCAA 2014).

'Students enrolled in VETiS may also combine study and employment through School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships, which allow students to do an apprenticeship or traineeship while they undertake their VCE or VCAL' (DET 2013).

### **3.2 National standards**

'The national standards are used by VET regulators to protect the interests of all students undertaking vocational education and training in Australia. The standards guide nationally consistent, high-quality training and assessment services in the VET system. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is the national policy for regulated qualifications in the Australian education and training system. It incorporates the quality assured qualifications from each education and training sector into a single comprehensive national qualifications framework' (DET 2013).

### **3.3 The regulators**

In 2011 the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) was established as the national regulator for Australia's vocational education and training sector. The Australian Government has made recent changes to ASQA's funding model to reduce the regulatory burden for training providers. Two states, Victoria and Western Australia, maintain responsibility for regulating registered training organisations that only train domestic students and only operate in either or both of these states. The VET regulators in these states are the:

- Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority
- Training and Accreditation Council Western Australia  
(DET 2013)

### **3.4 VET review**

The state government has commissioned a review of the VET sector. The preliminary findings of the review have been documented in the VET Issues Paper. The following key findings have been documented in the Issues paper.

'High-quality and accessible vocational education and training has never been more important than it is today. A strong, stable and accessible VET system is an important driver of growth and the foundation of a responsive and adaptable economy' (VET Issues Paper 2015).

'It also has a key role in supporting those experiencing all forms of disadvantage, and helping them toward greater economic and social participation. It is the sector of tertiary education that must be accessible to all, and work as an equal partner with Victoria's schools and universities to foster a culture of lifelong learning and skill development' (VET Issues Paper 2015).

'VET has an important role in providing training and access to further education by vulnerable, disadvantaged and high needs groups, and the funding system should ensure that this is recognised and supported. This could include a new way of thinking about community service obligations, changes to loadings and concessions, and creation of a new preparatory year to provide students with foundational skills' (VET Issues Paper 2015).

### **Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS)**

'VETiS can be delivered by schools themselves (where they are also registered as training providers), or commission others (such as a TAFE) to deliver or to auspice the training in the school. For TAFE institutes, VETiS being delivered by schools raised a number of quality and compliance issues, as VET delivery is not core business for schools' (VET Issues Paper 2015).

'School principals and teachers expressed concern that VETiS was underfunded, with many ceasing to deliver VET themselves due to the costs and compliance issues. Many moved to be purchasers of VET in order to continue to offer VETiS for their students. Private providers considered VETiS to be an area of high interest and value to young people' (VET Issues Paper 2015).

'Employers felt VETiS was complex and difficult to navigate. Areas needing improvement from the perspective of employers include clear expectations for outcomes, simple and consistent regulation of delivery programs, minimal paperwork obligations, exposure to jobs and work environments, development of relationships between schools and employers, and education for employers on creating a positive work experience. Other views included a need for a focus on vocational learning rather than VET qualifications' (VET Issues Paper 2015).

### **3.5 Overview of the Wimmera Southern Mallee region**

The Wimmera Southern Mallee region incorporates the municipalities of West Wimmera, Hindmarsh, Yarriambiack, Northern Grampians and Horsham and covers an area of 33,943 km<sup>2</sup> (approximately 14% of Victoria's geographical area). Sections of the Buloke and Southern Grampians shires are also included for the purposes of this report.

There are 14 secondary colleges in the region. Birchip P-12 School, Balmoral Community College (WSM VET cluster) and Donald High School (NC VET cluster) are members of region's cluster networks. The schools in each LGA are as follows:

**Hindmarsh** – Dimboola Memorial Secondary College, Nhill College & Rainbow P-12 College

**Horsham** – Horsham College & St. Brigid's College

**Northern Grampians** – Stawell Secondary College & St. Arnaud Secondary College

**West Wimmera** – Edenhope College, Goroke P-12 College & Kaniva College

**Yarriambiack** – Hopetoun P-12 College, Murtoa College & Warracknabeal Secondary College

**Buloke** – Birchip P-12 School & Donald High School

**Southern Grampians** – Balmoral Community College

### **3.6 Wimmera Southern Mallee Region employment and economic profile**

The economy of the Wimmera Southern Mallee declined over the past decade, and has lagged behind the rest of Victoria. Both population and productivity have fallen over this time. The region also has the third lowest labour force participation rate in regional Victoria (ACFE Grampians Regional Council 2015). The Wimmera Southern Mallee has faced significant economic and social challenges over the past 15 years. From 2002-2012 the region's economy suffered a **negative** annual 2.8% growth rate compared to average annual 2.8% growth across Victoria (Vocational Training: Victoria's Regional Report 2013). A recession is two quarters of negative growth – in effect the region has endured an 11 year recession.

The population has declined by an annual average of 0.3 per cent over the last decade resulting in the loss of businesses and services.

The region faces challenges in the medium to long-term around human capital development (improving workforce skills, increasing participation in training and employment). A skilled and literate workforce is essential to enable investment and innovation. The development of human capital will further strengthen and diversify regional strategic sectors and support the attraction and retention of people in the region (ACFE Grampians Regional Council 2014). For more information regarding the region’s employment and economic profile, see Appendix 4.



The Wimmera Southern Mallee region

#### 4. VETiS in the Wimmera Southern Mallee

##### Section 4 Summary

- There are 13 schools and 5 providers in the Wimmera Southern Mallee VET cluster
- Stawell Secondary College is a member of the Central Grampians VET cluster
- St. Arnaud Secondary College is a member of the North Central VET cluster
- The numbers of students undertaking a VETiS course is trending upwards
- Government schools are provided with targeted VETiS funding to meet the additional cost of delivering VETiS
- Schools are challenged by a shortfall in funding for VETiS courses

##### 4.1 Overview of VETiS across the Wimmera Southern Mallee region

The VETiS program is a critical element of secondary school curriculum across the region. Wimmera Southern Mallee (WSM) schools are primarily served by the WSM VET cluster network. This network includes 13 schools, five training providers and the Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN. Participating schools are Balmoral, Birchip, Dimboola, Edenhope, Goroke, Hopetoun, Horsham, Kaniva, Murtoa, Nhill, Rainbow, St. Brigid's and Warracknabeal Colleges. The providers include Federation University, Longerenong College, Skillinvest, Wimmera HUB and Horsham College. The VET cluster is coordinated by the Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN. The coordinator's position is funded by the schools' financial contributions.

Stawell Secondary College is a member of the Central Grampians VET cluster (Stawell and Ararat schools) and St. Arnaud College is a member of the North Central VET cluster.

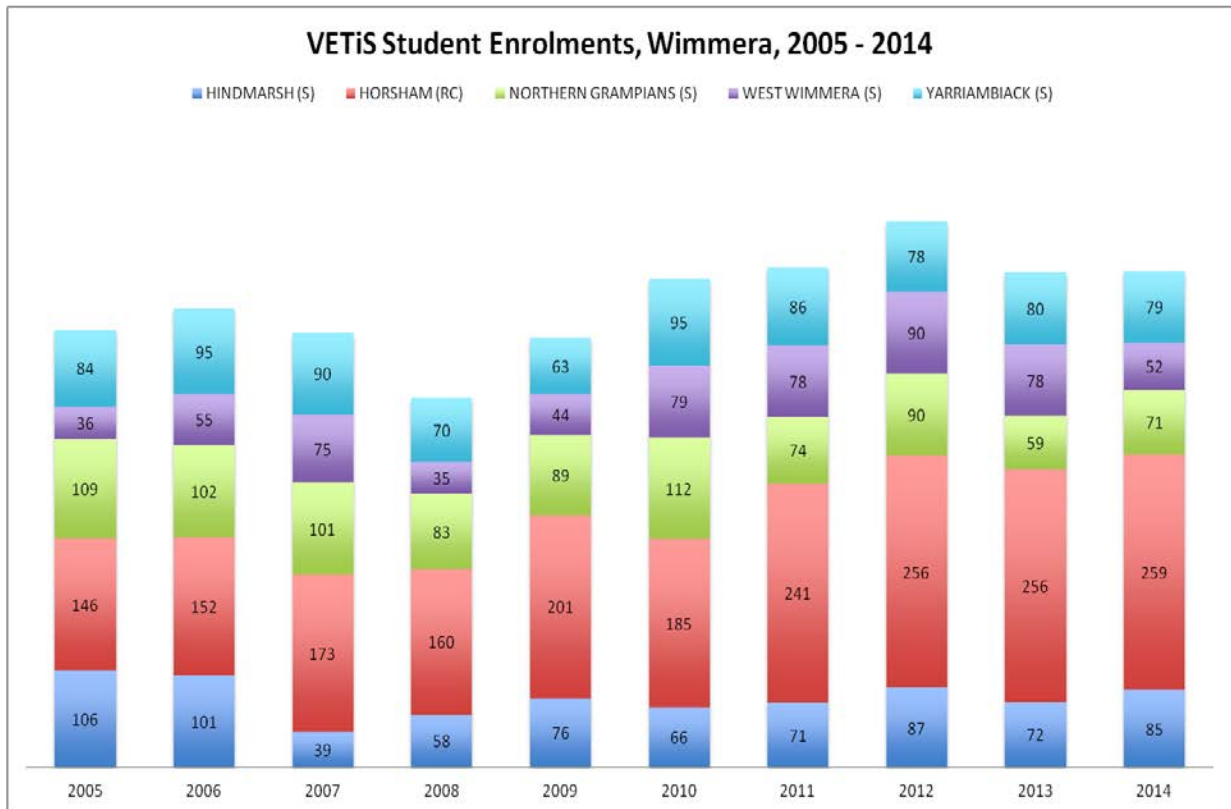
The following tables document the growing numbers of students seeking a VET qualification. This increase is against a background of declining student enrolments in most schools.

**Table 4.1a Number of students enrolled in at least one VET certificate, 2005 -2014**

LGA of student's home school	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
HINDMARSH (S)	106	101	39	58	76	66	71	87	72	85
HORSHAM (RC)	146	152	173	160	201	185	241	256	256	259
NORTHERN GRAMPIANS (S)	109	102	101	83	89	112	74	90	59	71
WEST WIMMERA (S)	36	55	75	35	44	79	78	90	78	52
YARRIAMBIACK (S)	84	95	90	70	63	95	86	78	80	79
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>473</b>	<b>537</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>601</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>546</b>

(VCAA 2015)

**Table 4.1b Number of students enrolled in at least one VET certificate, 2005 -2014**



(VCAA 2015)

#### 4.2 Funding VETiS in the Wimmera Southern Mallee

The VETiS courses are paid for by schools. Schools are funded by a Student Resource Package which is funding from the DET for each enrolled student. The SRP 2015 rate per enrolled student is \$7,882 (Most of the SRP is received as a 'credit' (not cash) to cover staff wages and operational costs). Smaller schools in rural areas also receive:

- a Small School Base is provided to secondary colleges with less than 400 students. For secondary colleges, the base is a flat amount up to 110 enrolments after which it reduces as enrolments increase
- funding under the Rural School Size Adjustment Factor. The Rurality component is provided to small rural schools to ensure that their educational provisions are the equal of urban areas. This funding applies to eligible secondary schools with enrolments of up to 500 students. The Rural School Size Adjustment Factor allocation to schools is split into credit and cash and contains provisions for payroll tax, superannuation, relief teaching and professional development (DET 2015).

Government schools are provided with targeted VETiS funding to meet the additional cost of delivering VETiS. This funding to Government schools is in addition to the core student learning allocation in the SRP that schools attract for each enrolment (DET 2015). The targeted funding is 'banded' according to the course undertaken. Courses which lead to strong employment outcomes in skill shortage areas are

generally ranked higher than courses which do not. Banding levels and amounts are displayed in the following table.

**Table 4.2 VETiS funding band level – targeted funding for schools for VETiS students**

Band level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
(\$)	993.00	886.00	807.00	762.00	688.00	408.00	333.00	297.00

(DET 2015)

Schools are challenged by a shortfall in funding for VETiS courses. Courses costs range from \$1510 - \$3200. The targeted VETiS banded funding ranges from \$297 - \$993, so schools are required to expend a significant amount of an individual’s SRP to cover the costs. Students cannot be charged for VETiS subject. Families make a contribution towards materials used in the courses and any travel costs.

Theoretically schools should be able to make savings because they do not have to deliver face to face classes to the students who are attending VETiS classes. However, the practical reality is that only 1-2 students may be attending VETiS, so there is still a class needing to be taught back at the base school. Due to the centralised delivery of VETiS in Horsham, VETiS classes must all be delivered on the same day, meaning that they cannot be run as part of the normal timetable.

**Case study snapshot**

*Nhill College student ‘Jack’ is enrolled in a VETiS 2<sup>nd</sup> year plumbing course. His school is charged \$3,200 for the course. The school receives the maximum Band 1 funding of \$993 and the rural rate contribution of \$312 (see example below). This leaves the school to fund ‘out of pocket’ costs of \$1895 from Jack’s SRP.*

The rural rate is applied to schools that are a certain distance from Melbourne. Schools above 0.2 rating are eligible for the funding. For example, Nhill College has a ‘location index rural rating’ of 0.62. The funding is calculated by multiplying the Location Index x Rural Rate. For example if a student from Nhill College was doing VETiS this year, the ‘rural rate’ funding available to the school would be  $1 \times 0.62 \times 504 = \$312.48$

**Table 4.3 Current (2015) course costs for Wimmera Southern Mallee VETiS cluster**

<b>Course</b>	<b>Provider</b>	<b>First Year (cost to schools)</b>	<b>Second Year (cost to schools)</b>	<b>Student enrolment s (1<sup>st</sup> &amp; 2<sup>nd</sup> year)</b>	<b>VETiS funding (from DET to offset school costs)</b>
Agriculture	Longerenong	\$1510	\$1510	27	\$886
Automotive	Skillinvest	\$1905	\$1985	22	\$886
Building & Construction	Skillinvest	\$1990	\$1925	32	\$993
Community Services	Wimmera HUB	\$1900	\$1945	34	\$408
Electrotechnology	Federation Uni	\$2584	(not delivered)	13	\$807
Engineering	Longerenong	\$1611	\$1611	21	\$886
Furniture Making	Horsham College	\$2000	\$2000	16	\$993
Hairdressing	Federation Uni	\$2507	\$2282	21	\$762
Health Services Assistance <sup>1</sup>	Federation Uni	\$3172 (not delivered)	\$2140	15	\$886
Integrated Technologies	Federation Uni	(not delivered)	\$2791	5	\$688
Kitchen Operations	Horsham College	\$2000	\$2000	20	\$807
Music	Horsham College	\$2000	\$2000	9	\$688
Plumbing	Federation Uni	\$2960	\$3200	11	\$993
Retail Makeup	Federation Uni	\$2750	\$2750	15	\$807
Sport & Recreation	Horsham College	\$2000	\$2000	25	\$333
Visual Arts	Not delivered in 2015		\$2475		\$688

(WSM VET cluster coordinator)

<sup>1</sup> The proposed cost of the Health Services Assistance course had risen to \$5200 per student due to insufficient numbers of students. Schools were unable to fund their students to participate, so the course did not go ahead.



## 5. Issues and barriers impacting on schools for VETiS delivery

### Section 5 summary

#### Schools

- Schools have identified the cost of VETiS courses, inadequate funding, fluctuating demand due to low student numbers and transport as the biggest barriers to VETiS delivery in the region
- The second tier of barriers include the difficulty of providing appropriate vocational education to learners with low literacy (including disadvantaged cohorts; CALD, Koorie and students with a disability), limited choice of providers and the availability of quality trainers
- There is a gaping hole of information exchange and quality control which was once filled by the DET Regional Senior School Programs Officer. The 2011-12 DET restructure resulted in that position being cut

In order to document the most significant issues and barriers impacting on VETiS delivery across the region, an extensive consultation and interview process with key stakeholders was undertaken. The following sections will detail the most significant concerns of principals and schools, the DET Regional Senior Adviser, VETiS providers and the VET cluster coordinator.

There are four priority areas that principals and schools see as the main issues and barriers to the delivery of VETiS in the Wimmera.

1. The cost of VET courses is seen as the most significant barrier for schools
2. The funding available to offset these costs is seen as inadequate
3. The relatively small number of students across the region creates significant challenges for schools and the VET cluster to ensure that there are sufficient numbers for the delivery of courses
4. The geographical size that the cluster covers and the transport time and cost imposition on students and families

**Costs:** The costs of VETiS provision is seen by schools as the most critical barrier. The WSM VET cluster has limited providers to make charges more competitive (although all RTOs contend that they deliver the courses at, or below, cost). This has improved recently with the increased offerings of Skillinvest and Horsham College auspiced courses. The cost of VET courses can be more than a third of the student resource package (SRP) funding issued to the school. In 2015, Murtoa College is not able to fund Year 10 students to do VET courses due to budget constraints.

A number of schools have chosen to deliver VET themselves to save on costs. This may, to some degree, threaten the viability of VET units offered in Horsham by RTOs in the longer term. The impact of this, in the future, may disadvantage students from schools that do not have the numbers or capacity to deliver their own VET courses.

**Funding:** The funding of the VETiS program is a significant related issue. As the cost of courses increases, a greater proportion of school funding is required to enable students to enrol in their desired course. Funding does not match the outlay of costs for VET courses. Schools have no capacity to charge

parents except for limited book/equipment/materials fees. Most outlying schools send small numbers to VET so classes continue at the school for non-VET students. This means there are no savings for the school on teaching time.

Schools delivering VETiS on site have some financial advantages. The school only pays an auspicating fee and uses currently employed staff to deliver courses. This, however, ties up staff members to the delivery of the VET program, potentially limiting student options at the school for non VET students. Schools may be inclined to 'steer' students into a VET option because it can be delivered at the school. Some schools have been able to combine VET courses with normal curriculum elective options.

**Demand:** A significant challenge for schools is ascertaining the demand and final numbers for VETiS courses. Demand fluctuates from year to year so there is no easy way to predict numbers in courses on an annual basis. With the anticipated inclusion of several more courses at Horsham College in 2016, this may reduce student numbers even further into different programs, potentially taking away from student numbers in other 'at risk' programs. This makes it difficult for RTOs to undertake long range planning for staff. There appears to be some more favoured courses that will always run: hair, beauty, hospitality, engineering, auto, building and construction. Because a number of schools are offering hospitality at their own school, this may mean that the numbers for hospitality delivered by the cluster are potentially low, potentially threatening the delivery of the course to the region's school network.

Courses with strong vocational outcomes (such as Cert III Health Services Assistance) have failed to run due to lack of numbers (having 11 students instead of the required 12) meaning students miss out. As student numbers decline, the cost of the course goes up.

**Transport:** Students from outlying schools in the Wimmera cluster have a major added cost to their VET program due to travel costs. Students from the outlying towns need to pay up to \$22 per week for transport costs. Some schools in the Wimmera have a linking school bus to get them to VET but others are dependent on private bus runs or there are no bus runs available. Government funding is provided to support students in the North Central cluster for buses.

#### Case study snapshot

*'Jane' lives on a farm near Woomelang and attends Hopetoun P-12 College. Jane is enrolled in a VETiS Agriculture course at Longerenong College. Every Wednesday, Jane rises by 5.30 am and needs to leave the farm at 6.20 am to catch the 6.50 am bus from Hopetoun. The bus then picks up students at Yaapeet, Rainbow, Jeparit, Dimboola and Pimpinio and arrives at Horsham at 9.05 am. Jane then catches another bus to Longerenong College which is situated 13 km northeast of Horsham. At the end of the day, Jane catches the bus back into Horsham. She transfers to the Horsham – Hopetoun bus at 4.15 pm, arriving in Hopetoun at 6.20 pm. One of Jane's parents picks her up and they travel together back to the farm, arriving at 6.50 pm after a 400 km round trip and a very long day. Jane's parents pay \$21.40 per week for bus fares.*

**Unmet demand:** There is a need for a VET or similar course that is similar to the 'Hands On Learning' program<sup>2</sup>. This course would enable the development of practical skills for students with very limited literacy/numeracy (including CALD and disability students). These students often do not have the literacy skills to achieve success in a current VETiS course. This 'modified' course would also provide access for students in alternative re-engagement programs such as Connect Ed and Satellite VCAL. At present, students who are not academic and want to participate in a 'hands on' option often struggle with the literacy requirements of VET subjects. This can lead to students having no options and no reason to stay engaged in education. There does not seem to be a suitable alternative career pathway available for them.

**Delivery:** Units delivered in some Certificate courses can vary considerably depending on the trainer / RTO provider. Engaging students in areas such as OH&S and providing relevant and engaging units of work for students with a wide range of skills and abilities is vital for the success of VET delivery. A differentiated curriculum needs to be provided and schools should monitor the selection and suitability of students enrolling in and undertaking VET units.

**Policies:** Schools made little mention of policy concerns; however, there is still a gaping hole of information exchange and quality control which was once filled with the DET Regional Senior School Programs Officer. Recent departmental restructure saw that position cut. Currently there is a well functioning VET cluster which meets monthly. There is a VET cluster coordinator working for the WSMLEEN (subsidised by the schools) who provides a major link between the VET providers and the school VET coordinators and organises student selection, student VET taster days, VET offerings and produces the VET handbook. There is some uncertainty related to the ongoing viability of VETiS coordination by the existing provider (under the current model) due to funding cuts.

**Providers:** The schools' main concern, currently, is about Federation Uni as a training provider. Issues include the cost of their courses, fluid nature of costs and the uncertainty of trainer availability earlier this year with the delivery of Cert III Health Services.

There are also some concerns about the suitability and quality of some providers' trainers but it is noted that the majority of trainers are good.

**Trainers:** Schools need to ensure staff stability with VET program delivery on their own site. Sourcing other trainers is sometimes required, due to long service leave, family leave or transfers etc. and this can be difficult for individual schools. Some schools have had to access Horsham RTOs midway through the year when their own trainer has left or is unavailable. This may not always be possible. RTOs tend to have a greater capacity to find alternative trainers. There is a need for schools and RTOs to have succession plans in place if delivering popular VET Certificates. If schools are delivering VET courses within their own schools, they must ensure that quality control processes are in place

**Facilities:** Facilities appear to be generally good and improving with the new provider in a couple of areas. The Wimmera Trade Training Centre facilities will potentially be used more often with the increase in offerings from Horsham College in 2016.

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<sup>2</sup> Hands On Learning is an innovative education program that caters to the different ways young people learn. Two artisan-teachers work collaboratively with small groups of cross-age students on authentic building projects that provide a platform for students to engage, grow confidence and achieve success at school (<http://handsonlearning.org.au/>)

## 6. VET delivery in the Wimmera – DET Regional concerns

### Section 6 summary

- The cost of VETiS courses is a significant challenge for schools
- The cost of courses is variable and some RTOs charge different prices depending on the student enrolment making it difficult for schools to budget for VETiS
- Students from outlying towns are dependent on public transport to undertake their VETiS course. This costs some students more than \$660 per annum.
- Schools and providers need to consider the possibilities of remote delivery of some VET programs. Digital course development and adaptation will need to occur
- The DET's removal of the Senior School Program Coordinator left numerous 'gaps' in the smooth delivery of VET across the region
- Rising course and transport costs may reduce the number of students undertaking VETiS, which has the potential to impact on the viable delivery of some courses
- It is difficult for students to complete a Certificate III due to time constraints. Schools and providers should consider 'block release' course delivery during school holidays

Brendan Ryan, Senior Adviser (South-Western Victoria Region) for the Department of Education (DET) made the following observations regarding the challenges of VETiS provision across the region. The barriers are listed in order of importance with the most significant challenge being listed first.

**Costs:** The cost of VETiS courses is a significant challenge for schools. The cost of courses is variable and some RTOs charge different prices depending on the student enrolment. This means those course costs are not finalised until final numbers of enrolments are known, making it difficult for schools to budget for VETiS provision.

**Transport:** The VET program for outlying students is dependent on access to a bus for transportation to Horsham where the majority of courses are delivered. Provision of public transport is critical for isolated rural students to access VET options. Any student travelling from outside Horsham must also cover travelling costs such as public bus routes (Up to \$19.00 in 2015) per round trip from Birchip with an added \$3.60 if a student needs to travel out to Longerenong College. If schools support student travel, it is an extra burden on the school.

**Sustainability and the future:** There is a need for schools and providers to look at the possibilities of remote delivery of some VET programs. There needs to be reliable NBN and ITC networks in regional areas. Digital course development and adaptation will need to occur. This would open up opportunities and also potentially save transport costs. Succession planning should be occurring in schools to ensure that suitably qualified personnel are helping students determine an appropriate pathway for their future.

**Quality:** The DET's removal of the Senior School Program Coordinator left numerous 'gaps' in the smooth delivery of VET programs in the region. There is still a need to ensure good communication between schools, VET Coordinators, RTOs, students and parents. There needs to be some quality

control of the courses offered, the correct recording of student data and the appropriate recommendations for students depending on their career pathway.

**Funding:** Various funding bands are set state wide. There are concerns about the ability of schools to cover costs. Schools are accused of 'double dipping' with VET and student resource package (SRP) funding but rural schools would have difficulty providing for VET students and 'standard curriculum' students unless they had access to both pools of funding.

Classes back at school still have to run whilst small numbers of students attend VET. Schools may be limiting student choice by excluding VET pathways for some students due to cost. Schools should not be channelling students into their own school's VET programs for the sake of financial benefit. Appropriate individual student pathways should always be the priority.

**Policies:** There needs to be an agreed and consistent policy/protocol framework in place for all schools accessing VET and for RTOs delivering courses. There are already shared documents such as Code of Conduct, enrolment consent, VETiS application forms, course calendar and absence forms.

There are a number of areas which could still be standardised and formalised across the region. VET administration may be assisted by the development of a consistent set of templates, accessible electronically, that may ease to workload of VET coordinators as well as provide quality assurance in documentation across all schools in the region. Regular annual feedback should be obtained on VET courses and auspiced courses within schools to ensure quality control.

**Demand:** There are concerns about demand if schools outside of the Horsham area continue to develop courses within their own schools. Decreasing numbers attending (cluster delivered VETiS) in Horsham may make a course non-viable for an RTO to deliver. This may disadvantage smaller schools not delivering VET courses.

Rising course costs may reduce the number of students able to access VET courses through the school (some schools have already taken year 10 VET off the table) and therefore also reduce enrolment numbers. Similarly, increasing bus costs may discourage some families from enrolling their student in VET, impacting on student VET enrolments.

**Providers:** Historically there were a few monopolies with VET delivery. This has changed for the better with a tender process undertaken for the delivery of courses. There is, perhaps, a need for multi-year contracts to give RTOs some capacity to provide stability for staffing and costing of courses. Some schools have upgraded their own facilities to become providers themselves. These schools potentially have the capacity to provide VET courses for other schools in the area (cluster providers). Training providers need to ensure that they have appropriately qualified staff in place to deliver the programs they have offered.

**Unmet demand:** There is a concern that some courses don't run due to low demand. One local provider (HUB) pulled out of the delivery of some VET units. The provision and successful completion of Certificate III courses is restricted due to time demands. Often only units of Certificate III are

delivered rather than whole course. The cluster perhaps needs to consider the possibility of a block release where students can complete a set number of days during holiday breaks, using Longerenong as a residential facility during this time for out of town students. This will create complications regarding extra cost for boarding and supervision. Longerenong will need to have the capacity to accommodate extra students.

There is the possibility of some of the courses being delivered digitally using multi modal means, similar to VCE delivery, where students can complete theory tasks on line but get their practical element marked off during a term visit by the trainer.

**Facilities:** Currently there are now options for VET delivery. Previously, the monopoly of some facilities by Federation Uni gave the regional schools little, if any, choice. There are no financial benefits for schools accessing Federation Uni Trade Training Centre facilities, even though schools contributed to the construction or upgrade of some of the facilities. This has led schools to look elsewhere for cheaper courses. 'Is there the possibility of Federation Uni leasing out its facilities if they do not?'

## 7. Issues and barriers for training providers to deliver VETiS services

### Section 7 summary

- The cost of delivering VETiS is a big issue for training providers. All providers deliver the VET subjects at, or below cost. This is sometimes calculated without overheads, so the true cost is often much higher than the providers charge
- The VETiS providers were united in their view that the delivery of VETiS is under-funded
- Rural students are consistently disadvantaged when an aggregated cohort cannot be achieved across the WSM cluster
- Some students do miss out, depending on their course selection and the number of other students registered to do the course
- The Wimmera Southern Mallee VET cluster is seen as an effective, efficient vehicle to plan, promote and deliver VET in our region's schools
- Providers would like to enter into multi-year agreements with the cluster to deliver to ensure that their capital investment in staff and equipment is justified

### Challenges regarding the costs incurred to deliver VETiS subjects

This is a big issue for training providers. All providers deliver the VET subjects at, or below cost. This is sometimes calculated without overheads, so the true cost is often much higher than the providers charge. Geoffrey Lord, Head of Western Campus, Federation University commented that *'current cost structures to deliver VETiS are set at 80% of cost recovery (direct delivery and auspicing)'*.

John Goldsmith, General Manager of Longerenong College observed that

*A full financial analysis of the program would show that we run at a loss. However not all of our activities should be analysed in isolation. We aim to be cost neutral when we set our fees, we don't include overheads. VETiS contributes 1.5% of our income but consumes far more than that in costs and time. We support the program as we see it as a feeder program for our full time students. If we cut the VETiS program we would have a more efficient business and happier staff (noting that the staff are not secondary teachers and have come from industry to train tertiary students).*

The General Manager of Skillinvest, Robin Kuhne, explained that *'we set the costs based on the number of participants with the program designed for cost recovery.'*

Rob Millar, Wimmera HUB Training Manager, concurred, saying *'we try to keep courses at a minimum cost to schools but if we lose a couple of students we can easily lose money in delivering the course'*.

Providers noted that the costs of appropriate facilities, maintenance, capital costs, materials, resources, trainers and compliance are significant. Some materials costs, such as steel, have risen sharply, further compounding cost pressures related to the delivery of VETiS.

The providers see the delivery of VET as part of their social responsibility to education and their communities. VETiS is seen as providing a pathway for students to gain employment or as a foundation for further training.

VETiS is a *'significant investment in terms of time but remains a step in providing employability skills to students that have a trade pathway in mind, post school. VET is a perfect vehicle for students to gain an insight into the requirements of undertaking an apprenticeship from a closely simulated work environment'*, said Robin Kuhne (Skillinvest).

John Goldsmith (Longerenong College) noted that *'we are cognisant of our responsibility to the schools and community to deliver affordable training. We need to be part of the process to stimulate our region's students to achieve and undertake training. We continue to deliver as we have a responsibility and commitment to our schools, our young people and agricultural training.'*

Geoffrey Lord (Federation University) observed that the

*direct funding of schools, TAFEs and RTOs in the delivery of public education to school aged cohorts is a responsibility of government and one which we see as core business for Federation University Australia and for Fed TAFE. We are part of the public education sector and proudly hold that mantle. Therefore appropriate funding of public education is essential for community cohesion, public order, and the maintenance and progression of the Australian way of life.*

### **Government policies and funding impact on the delivery of VETiS**

The VETiS providers were united in their view that the delivery of VETiS is under-funded. Geoffrey Lord (Federation University) made the following observations:

*VETiS has never been funded adequately. Historically the VETiS program grew out of the decision by the Ministerial Council (MINCO) to raise the national school leaving age to 17 years. No programs or funding was ever put in place to achieve the delivery of appropriate curriculum to the cohorts that would have naturally left prior to the age of 17. To the state's credit, the VETiS delivered in conjunction with TAFE and RTOs, in part, met and filled this gap. As subsequent funding has been withdrawn from DET schools, TAFE, and access to funds by RTOs, so has the ability to deliver effective VETiS to the schools.*

John Goldsmith (Longerenong College) stated that *'governments understand the value of VETiS but do not fund it to the extent of VET through the Victorian Training Guarantee (VTG). If the VTG model was applied to VETiS we could resource it better, decrease class sizes and improve quality'*.

Rob Millar (Wimmera HUB) commented that

*the tightening funding situation is driving some of the schools to deliver their own VET courses which impacts on class numbers for RTO providers. Schools cannot always afford to allow all students to undertake their courses, particularly students who may be transient or inconsistent in their attendance. The recent change in pre-accredited*



*funding also limits access for students who are really struggling. Students were previously able to benefit from some funding support ACFE for support offered out of school times. This is no longer available and has a negative impact on the most vulnerable learners. Support dollars are often only available once the student has disengaged from school and would be more helpful to support the students study if it was accessible during secondary schooling to complement it.*

### **Unmet demand for VET subjects**

Providers offered a mixed response to this question, due to the uptake of the specific courses they deliver. All providers acknowledged that some students do miss out, depending on their course selection and the number of other students registered to do the course.

John Goldsmith (Longerenong College) noted that this has not been an issue for VETiS Agriculture training. Rob Millar (Wimmera HUB) noted that only six students enrolled in Creative Industries in 2015 so there were not enough to enable the course to go ahead. Rob Kuhne (Skillinvest) found that it had not been a big issue for Skillinvest, but he was aware that some students missed out on doing Creative Arts in 2015.

Geoffrey Lord (Federation University) stated that

*rural students are consistently disadvantaged when an aggregated cohort cannot be achieved across the WSM cluster. If the combined cluster of 13 schools can only muster 8 or 9 students into an aggregated class, then the cost point for a viable course is unachievable. Extra financial pressure is being applied which does not allow classes with low numbers to proceed. A typical break-even point for a trade course within Fed Uni would be 45 students. We often run courses at a cut off point of 15 or 20 students, and have run aggregated courses across multiple years with cut-offs of 10 to 12 students. As you can see from these figures, the institution subsidises significantly the provision of public education within the WSM region.*

### **Can you quantify the numbers of potential students who miss out on undertaking their chosen VET course?**

The answer to this question varies depending on the courses offered. John Goldsmith (Longerenong College) said that no students missed out on doing agriculture through lack of places. Rob Kuhne (Skillinvest) noted that some students missed out on Engineering last year, but they were accommodated at Hopetoun via Skillinvest auspice arrangements.

Geoffrey Lord (Federation University) answered this question by describing the following real life situation that occurred this year.

#### **Case study snapshot**

*Fed Uni offered to deliver a first year pre-nursing VETiS program. 11 students from the cluster applied. One school had two students of the 11 and subsequently did not fund VETiS program at that year level (Year 10) for 2015 due to their budgetary constraints. This left a cohort of nine*

*students. With a minimum class size requirement of 15, Fed Uni was prepared to run the class for 12 students. With the withdrawal of two students and a revising of the cost to the remaining nine students, the cluster made the decision not to proceed with the training. This left 11 students from across the region without the ability to undertake a high demand, workforce need, professional training within the region. Nine of those students were forced to make another choice.*

### **Challenges related to working with the Wimmera Southern Mallee VET cluster**

The Wimmera Southern Mallee VET cluster is seen as an effective, efficient vehicle to plan, promote and deliver VET in our region's schools. The cluster comprises of 13 secondary schools, RTO's and providers and the Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN.

All providers reported strong positive relationships with the cluster. The providers noted that they make significant contributions of time, knowledge and resources to the cluster and this enhances the cluster's value.

Robin Kuhne (Skillinvest) noted that *'the cluster has built a significant knowledge bank in recent years and has the student's best interest in mind which, as an employer of apprentices, is admired. The local VET cluster coordinator provides effective and regular communication between all stakeholders.'*

John Goldsmith (Longerenong College) agreed that *'good communication is the key. We have developed a really good relationship with the cluster. We have good input into the cluster with our Longerenong VET coordinators. We work hard to meet the schools' requirements and deadlines.'*

Geoffrey Lord (Federation University) reported that *'we have a healthy professional relationship which requires a full engagement of all parties. We have strong working relationships with third parties and the schools and I value those relationships. The cluster works well.'*

Rob Millar (Wimmera HUB) agreed that *'the cluster is quite good and there are no major challenges'*.

### **Other challenges or barriers related to delivering VET classes**

The following challenges were noted by the providers.

#### ***Federation University***

- Geoffrey Lord (Federation University) queried the appropriateness of the offerings to the students, *'The delivery of subjects is filtered. The RTOs offer a range of courses. The school career counsellors are then required to stream the students into particular offerings which leaves me wondering what are the true interests of the students?'*
- Commuting time for the students and the lack of funding support for families of students who have to travel long distances.

### ***Longerenong College***

- Try VET delivery in July and Orientation Day – these events are good but require a significant amount of time and resources. Orientation Day is repeated in February. These events happen at busy times for us.
- Limited funding for resources and equipment - I acknowledge the upgrades for Engineering through the Wimmera Trade Training Centre but there is very little support for Agriculture
- Having to work within bus times – this cuts down class time for students (noting that this is not a major issue because staff adapt their training to suit the allocated time).

### ***Skillinvest***

- We have self funded infrastructure, rent, equipment and delivery of some new VET subjects this year at significant cost. We have some concerns about not having a guarantee to continue delivering in subsequent years. Ideally we would like to develop a contract to give some certainty regarding ongoing delivery.
- There is a tight time frame to deliver the course within 30-32 weeks.
- Cost based decisions should not over shadow the quality of the product and attached outcomes.

### ***Wimmera HUB***

- A future challenge - As some of the schools deliver the courses themselves, they may struggle to have teachers with industry currency to deliver the courses. Not all schools may be fully aware of the need to comply with all of the VET standards. Students need real life industry examples to be provided in their course.
- Schools are expected to fund VETiS for their students, but they have very tight budgets, as do RTOs. The challenge is to continue to deliver quality training in a restricted funding environment.

### **What aspects of the VETiS program across the Wimmera Southern Mallee region work well?**

The VETiS program across the region has many positives. Providers believe that the cluster arrangement works well and that there is strong positive coordination and collaboration across the network. Student behaviour and attendance is, overall, very good. Geoffrey Lord observed that students receive a quality experience from all providers and that they benefited from the exposure to other learning environments and potential careers outside of their home towns.

Students achieved excellent vocational and employment outcomes and many students are identified and recruited by employers during their VETiS studies. The students are trained in very positive environments leading to positive outcomes. *'Students develop a clear understanding of the vocation they study. Students often visit businesses to experience the workplace and to experience the field that they are studying. Students are then able to apply real life scenario to their learning back in the classroom'*, observed Rob Millar.

The transporting of students from communities across the region (covering more than 30,000 km<sup>2</sup>) works well. Providers noted that students and families from outlying communities were challenged by

the cost of the transport and the time required (up to two hours each way) for students to access their courses.

**If you think about VETiS in the WSM in five years' time, what should we be doing now to maximise the outcomes for students?**

The following suggestions were received from providers to support the future delivery of VETiS across the region:

- *Improve the funding model and base it on the Victorian Training Guarantee (VTG)<sup>3</sup>*
- *We have got our VET subjects about right for the employment opportunities that are offered locally. If the big picture is to retain local kids in our area, we should be setting our VET courses for local industry skill needs which I believe are about right. Perhaps we need to look at state government priorities and deliver VET subjects in those industries where future needs will be. The VET subjects we provide lead to employment opportunities in our region – this is the value add part of the program<sup>4</sup>*
- *Consolidate the membership of the WSM cluster<sup>5</sup>*
- *Continue to offer and deliver both hard and soft skill trades through existing contracted TAFEs and RTOs<sup>6</sup>*
- *Significant bolstering of funding support specific to VETiS provided directly to the cluster schools<sup>7</sup>*
- *Increase funding support to TAFE and RTOs to broaden the scope of registration offerings<sup>8</sup>*
- *We need to encourage more businesses to provide Structured Workplace Learning (SWL) placements, particularly with personnel changes in individual businesses. We need to improve industry engagement with VET and ensure that students have SWL opportunities<sup>9</sup>*
- *We have four students in our course from a non English speaking background. We would like to deliver a certificate in English program, instead of an alternative VET course which they will struggle with due to their low English skills. This may also help with their future employment prospects<sup>10</sup>*
- *In order to keep the program strong, it would be good to evaluate the value of the program – how many job outcomes and how many stay engaged in education and training? Perhaps target one of the programs/subjects delivered. Do the students see the link between their VET course and their employment?<sup>11</sup>*

**Other comments**

- *'Where does the VETiS program fit into the national training framework?' Certificate II outcomes at VETiS are different for students who do a VET Certificate II through full time study. There are better*

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<sup>3</sup> John Goldsmith

<sup>4</sup> Robin Kuhne

<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Lord

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Lord

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Lord

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Lord

<sup>9</sup> Robert Millar

<sup>10</sup> Robert Millar

<sup>11</sup> Robert Millar

*outcomes for students in VET courses out of VETiS. Students get to spend more hours with the trainers and also more practical 'on the job' experience. VETiS students do not spend as much time as a student who does Certificate II over a full year – fulltime VET students study Ag at Longerenong until September and then go on practical placement<sup>12</sup>*

- *Students in VETiS are being trained and being engaged<sup>13</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> John Goldsmith

<sup>13</sup> Robert Millar

## 8. Issues and barriers identified by the VET coordinator

The Wimmera Southern Mallee VET cluster coordinator, Dimity O'Bryan, made the following observations:

- There is a lack of competition between RTOs – they can charge what they want. The lack of providers in the region means no/low level of competition between providers – schools have had to accept price increases, as in many cases there is no alternative other than to auspice and deliver VET subjects
- Auspicing arrangements in most cases provide a cheaper option for schools but do not guarantee the quality of the program (The VASSP chair strongly believes that this is not the case)
- There is an additional cost to schools due to the need to coordinate and support the cluster (teacher release for cluster meetings and cost of VET coordinator)
- Schools can't charge students for the delivery of VET courses – they can only recoup the materials cost
- The government targeted VETiS subsidy of up to \$900 does not cover the cost of VET subjects (up to \$3,000 plus)
- Some schools limit students to one subject due to costs
- The cost of programs is encouraging schools to deliver their own “in house” programs, which results in fewer students travelling to Horsham to participate in programs. This could potentially decrease demand for programs to a point where they become non-viable to run. This will result in a reduction of the number of courses available and less choice for students
- School provision weakens the cluster and lessens the viability of courses due to lower numbers participating in the cluster VETiS program
- I have concerns regarding the stability of programs delivered “in house” – if the teacher leaves, gets sick, is in an accident etc. what happens to students enrolled in the program if a new teacher cannot be engaged quickly? Remote schools already have great difficulty attracting and employing teachers with the appropriate qualifications and skills.
- There is little or no support for students with low literacy and numeracy
- The cost of VET provision has prompted the cluster to seek alternative providers who do not have access to trade training centre funded facilities which were built or upgraded on RTO premises. Where TTC facilities are built on RTO premises, students cannot access TTC facilities unless schools agree to use that RTO and accept their course pricing, which can be significantly higher than alternative providers.
- Transport costs are high for students travelling from outlying schools. Costs can be more than \$660 per student per annum. Currently families can only claim conveyance allowance to the closest school or the closest bus stop to the closest school – not for travel to the training organisations.
- There are some conflicts between VET subjects and VCE classes – students have to catch up on classes they miss due to VET course
- Issues for special needs students to access or achieve in VET – either the student has no aide or the aide is unable to accompany the student
- Schools can choose not to offer VETiS subjects to their students if costs are prohibitive

- Some schools that deliver VET in house have the capacity to make a small profit or break even and will choose to do so rather than losing money sending their students to training by RTOs through the VET cluster. This may limit genuine student choice in the long term

**These common issues are also experienced by the Central Grampians VET cluster**

- Difficulty in attracting quality RTO provision and appropriate support to regional areas at an affordable cost
- Difficulty attracting appropriately qualified staff
- Small class sizes and low student numbers limiting the viability of programs - difficult to offer a diversity of courses that will suit all students while still maintaining viable class sizes
- Transport links between schools and between towns and regional centres (Ballarat, Horsham) not ideally suited to timetabling.
- Difficulty with VCE students missing classes to participate in VET - leading to schools withdrawing from cluster arrangements and delivering programs within the timetable.
- Maintaining the hands on component and industry currency - so that VET is not just another classroom book based subject.
- Optimising use of the Trade Training centre facilities.

## 9. Key findings, implications and recommendations

### Section 9 Summary

- Schools struggle with the cost of purchase of VET courses
- Providers are delivering VET courses below the true cost of delivery
- Declining school enrolments means less funding for schools and an increasingly difficult budget equation
- A sustainable VET system, delivering high-quality training, is an essential part of achieving the government's 'Education State' objectives
- The cost of courses, inadequate funding, fluctuating demand due to low student numbers and transport are the biggest barriers to VETiS delivery in the region
- The region faces significant challenges due to the combination of a challenged agri-based economy, shrinking and ageing population, declining school enrolments and the loss of business and services
- The growth, wellbeing and prosperity of the region are dependent on a literate, skilled future workforce. VETiS is a key element in the provision of training in the Wimmera

There are significant barriers to the optimum provision of VETiS across the region. Schools struggle with the cost of purchase of VET courses. Providers are delivering VET courses below the true cost of delivery. Fluctuating numbers of students enrolling in courses each year, make it difficult for training providers to fix the cost of the courses until final numbers are known. This makes it impossible for schools to accurately budget for the provision of VETiS for the forthcoming year.

### 9.1 Implications of this research for the Wimmera Southern Mallee schools

Most of the Wimmera Southern Mallee schools have a downward trend in their school enrolments, compounding the cost pressures on schools to provide their students with the education they deserve. Our young people deserve the same access and opportunities to the full range of curriculum as their metropolitan counterparts. Declining school enrolments means less funding for schools and an increasingly difficult budget equation to ensure that students have the means to aspire and achieve in their chosen field. This is even more important when one considers the education and limited career options to rural students in Victoria.

The state government recognises the importance of vocational education to the state. 'VET makes an important contribution to our society, in terms of both social and economic outcomes. A sustainable VET system, delivering high-quality training, is an essential part of achieving Government's ambition of Victoria becoming the Education State' (VET issues paper 2015). The state government need to adequately fund VET in schools in order to achieve their stated objectives.

This research project has identified cost of courses, inadequate funding, fluctuating demand due to low student numbers and transport as the biggest barriers to VETiS delivery in the region

The second tier of barriers include the limited choice of providers, the availability of quality trainers and the difficulty of providing appropriate vocational education to learners with low literacy (including disadvantaged cohorts; CALD, Koorie and students with a disability).



## **9.2 Implications of this research for the region's business and industry sector**

The Wimmera Southern Mallee region faces significant challenges due to a combination of a challenged agri-based economy, shrinking and ageing population, declining school enrolments and the loss of business and services. The region has very strong potential to arrest and reverse this downward trend through investment leading to jobs. The region has significant assets including a clean reliable water supply (Wimmera Mallee Pipeline), affordable land and housing, a clean, green environment, lakes and rivers and an innovative agricultural industry. The mining industry is set to grow significantly as companies look to capitalise on the significant mineral sands assets in the region. It is critical that the region 'grows its own' workforce. Recent history clearly demonstrates that it is difficult to recruit qualified people from outside of the region.

The VETiS program is an important first step to give local young people the opportunity to pursue their vocational ambitions. There are some exciting opportunities in agriculture, horticulture, mining, manufacturing, health and other sectors, but these opportunities can only be realised with a literate skilled workforce. 'High-quality and accessible vocational education and training has never been more important than it is today. A strong, stable and accessible VET system is an important driver of growth and the foundation of a responsive and adaptable economy' (VET issues paper 2015).

This research clearly identifies some key issues impacting on the current and future delivery of VETiS. By addressing these issues, a stronger foundation for vocational education can be created. This will provide young people with the education and training required to transition successfully to further education or employment. Local business and industry needs the right mix of skilled employees for current and future job opportunities. The growth, wellbeing and prosperity of the region is dependent on a future workforce that is capable of meeting the complex and changing demands of business and industry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### 9.3 Recommendations

Area	Recommendation	Action	Outcomes
<b>Funding</b>	Increase financial support to provide all students with opportunities to do the VETiS course of their choice	Lobby state government to include the VETiS courses in the Victorian Training Guarantee (VTG) model and increase the Rural Allowance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased school participation</li> <li>• Increased student participation</li> </ul>
<b>Transport</b>	PTV and DET support for travel to attend VETiS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek adjustments to the current funding guidelines for Conveyance Allowance Program (CAP)</li> <li>• Promote the availability of CAP support to all schools and families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased student participation</li> <li>• Decreased disadvantage for rural and remote students</li> </ul>
<b>VETiS Delivery</b>	Maximise the regional delivery modes of VETiS	Investigate various options for delivery of VETiS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Block release <i>i.e. school holidays</i></li> <li>• Online components</li> <li>• Common units delivered in school prior to starting course <i>i.e. White card, OH&amp;S</i></li> <li>• Combining core units across multiple disciplines</li> <li>• Pilot literacy and numeracy improvement program for VETiS / VCAL students including the CALD community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased participation rates</li> <li>• Cost effective delivery</li> <li>• Additional literacy and numeracy support</li> </ul>
<b>Program Coordination</b>	Improve administration support required by schools for the implementation of VETiS	Lobby the state government to provide funding to schools to assist with added administration costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved administration and data collection</li> </ul>
	Improve regional VETiS cluster coordination	Lobby the state government for funding for a regional VETiS coordinator	The coordinator will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate the WSM VETiS cluster</li> <li>• Develop and maintain pathways from school into work</li> <li>• Provide career advice and support to students considering VETiS</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with 'at risk' students to increase VETiS participation rates and outcomes through programs such as 'Connect Ed'</li> <li>• Ensure sustainability of the WSM VETiS cluster</li> <li>• Maintain and further develop the partnerships between schools and RTO's within the region</li> </ul>
	Investigate timetable alignment of cluster schools	Work with the VETiS cluster schools to create a common timetable across the cluster	Facilitates the delivery of any future 'virtual' delivery of VETiS courses
<b>Future</b>	Measure post-school outcomes of VETiS students	Undertake a further VETiS research project (beyond the scope of this report)	Track and evaluate students' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pathways and destinations</li> <li>• Employment outcomes</li> <li>• The impact of low literacy on completion</li> <li>• The engagement and outcomes of disadvantaged cohorts</li> </ul>
	Through curriculum design develop VET pathways in Years 7-9	Work with the DET to increase the vocational offerings for students in the middle years	Provides vocational education for students who may not wish to pursue an academic pathway

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## Acronyms

ACFE	Adult, Community and Further Education
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
CALD	Culturally And Linguistically Diverse
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DET pre 2015)
DET	Department of Education and Training
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SRP	Student Resource Package
TAFE	Technical And Further Education
VASSP	Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETiS	Vocational Education and Training in Schools
VRQA	Victorian Registration and Qualification Authority
WDA	Wimmera Development Association
WSM	Wimmera Southern Mallee

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Project interview questions

<b>2015 Barriers to Vocational Education and Training in Schools in the Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN</b>	
Commissioned by the Wimmera Development Association	
Authored by the Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN	
Questions for RTOs – identification of issues and barriers for training providers to deliver VETiS in the Wimmera Southern Mallee	
Background: Wimmera Development Association seeks to document the issues and barriers to providing Vocational Education and Training in Schools in the region - for students, schools and training providers. This will enable the region to make representations to relevant government agencies and regional forum for targeted interventions to address education and training issues and barriers, impacting on the growth of the region.	
Informed consent: By participating in this interview, I am giving my informed consent for this information to be used in a report for the Wimmera Development Association. I understand that this report will be locally published and used for advocacy and to make representations to government, government departments and other stakeholders to support targeted improvements in the delivery of VETiS in our region. I understand that I can withdraw my participation and comments at any time, up to the release of the final report on the 31 <sup>st</sup> August 2015.	
I am authorised by my organisation to represent it and make relevant comments about the delivery of VET in schools.	
I authorise/do not authorise (strike out the option that doesn't apply) the use of my name and the name of the RTO I represent to be attributed to my comments	
Signed	Date
RTO:	
Name and position	
Interviewed by Tim Shaw on	
1. What are the challenges regarding the costs incurred to deliver VETiS subjects?	
2. How do government policies and funding criteria impact on your ability to deliver VETiS?	
3. Given the need for minimum class sizes, do you think there is unmet demand for VET subjects?	
4. Can you quantify, or estimate, the numbers of potential students who miss out on	

undertaking their chosen VET course?
5. What are the challenges related to working with the Wimmera Southern Mallee VET cluster?
6. What are the other challenges or barriers related to delivering VET classes?
7. What aspects of the VETiS program across the Wimmera Southern Mallee region work well?
8. If you think about VETiS in the WSM in five years' time, what should we be doing now to maximise the outcomes for students?
Do you have any other comments? Please detail them.

(Developed by the WSMLLEN)

## **Appendix 2: Project survey questions for school VET coordinators**

Please indicate which of the following you consider to be barriers to the provision of Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region and rate them on a scale of 1 (not much of a barrier at all) to 10 (a very significant barrier)

- a) Cost to schools of VETiS courses
- b) Lack of or insufficient funding provided to schools to pay for VETiS courses
- c) Distance students are required to travel to access VETiS training
- d) Cost of transport for students
- e) Lack of competition or choice among RTOs
- f) Cost of program coordination (staff release for coordination and cluster meetings etc. as well as cluster VET Coordinator role contributions)
- g) Impact on student curriculum
- h) Lack of student numbers sufficient to run particular courses/minimum class sizes imposed by RTOs

(Developed by the WSMLEEN)

### **Appendix 3: 2015 VETiS subjects delivered in the Wimmera Southern Mallee**

#### **2015 VETiS courses (WSM cluster network: Horsham)**

1. AHC20110 Certificate II in Agriculture
2. 22015VIC Certificate II in Automotive Studies
3. 22216VIC Certificate II in Building and Construction
4. CHC20112 Certificate II in Community Services
5. CUF20107 Certificate II in Creative Industries (Media)
6. UEE22011 Certificate II in Electrotechnology (Career Start)
7. 22209VIC Certificate II in Engineering
8. MEM30205 Certificate III in Engineering (Mechanical, Partial)
9. MSF20313 Certificate II in Furniture Making
10. SIH20111 Certificate II in Hairdressing
11. HLT32512 Certificate III in Health Services Assistance
12. 22071VIC Certificate II in Integrated Technologies (teach out 2015)
13. SIT20312 Certificate II in Kitchen Operations
14. CUS20109 Certificate II in Music
15. 22138VIC Certificate II in Plumbing (Pre-apprenticeship)
16. SIB20110 Certificate II in Retail Makeup and Skincare
17. SIS30513 Certificate III in Sport and Recreation
18. CUV30111 Certificate III in Visual Arts (second year only)

(WSM VET Cluster Coordinator)

#### **2015 VETiS courses (Central Grampians VET cluster)**

1. Building and Construction at Ararat College
2. Sport and Recreation at Marian College
3. Automotive at Stawell Secondary
4. Hospitality at Ararat College
5. Children's Services and Community Services at Stawell Secondary

Students also travel to Ballarat for Animal Studies and Longerenong for Agriculture

**Marian College in Ararat also delivers** Business, Public Safety, Information Technology, Lab Skills, Automotive, Building and Construction and Viticulture courses. Some students from Stawell, Ararat and Beaufort Colleges attend the VETiS courses at Marian College.



#### **Appendix 4: Wimmera Southern Mallee Region employment and economic profile**

The economy of the Wimmera Southern Mallee declined over the past decade, and has lagged behind the rest of Victoria. Both population and productivity have fallen over this time. The region also has the third lowest labour force participation rate in regional Victoria.

The Wimmera Southern Mallee has faced significant economic and social challenges over the past 15 years. From 2002-2012 the region's economy suffered a negative annual 2.8% growth rate (compared to average annual 2.8% growth across Victoria). A recession is two quarters of negative growth – in effect the region has endured an 11 year recession. The population has declined by an annual average of 0.3 per cent over the last decade resulting in the loss of businesses and services.

The region faces challenges in the medium to long-term around human capital development (improving workforce skills, increasing participation in training and employment), enabling investment and innovation to further strengthen and diversify regional strategic sectors, attracting and retaining people in the region, ensuring the viability of the Agriculture sector amidst resource constraints and improving infrastructure to facilitate access to intra and inter-state markets.

Wimmera Southern Mallee's economy is very concentrated around Agriculture, accounting for 23 per cent of the Gross Regional Product (GRP). Manufacturing and Health Care and Social Assistance are the next largest contributors to GRP. These three industries contributed around 43 per cent of the GRP in 2011.

The concentration in industry GRP is also reflected in employment numbers in the region. In 2011, the largest contributors to Wimmera Southern Mallee's employment were Agriculture, Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade and Manufacturing.

The region has also experienced a higher rate of structural change than the rest of the state and regional Victoria. Drought had a major impact in the regional economy, due to the region's economic concentration around Agriculture. However, the economy has diversified over the past decade, with service sectors such as finance, health and education becoming increasingly important to the regional economy.

The Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Health Care and Social Assistance industries had the largest shares of employment and vocational training enrolments in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region. The employment and vocational training enrolments shares in these industries are more consistent in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region than in Victoria as a whole. Enrolments related to health and aged care occupations are above the state average overall, and will help meet the needs of an ageing population (Vocational Training: Victoria's Regions 2013).

## Appendix 5: Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional VET Delivery

- There were 2,800 government subsidised vocational training enrolments in Wimmera Southern Mallee in 2012, making it Victoria's smallest training market in terms of government subsidised enrolments.
- Wimmera Southern Mallee experienced slightly above average growth in enrolments over 2012, compared to regional Victoria as a whole. Most of this growth came from private providers, but was also seen in TAFE and ACE enrolments.
- Wimmera Southern Mallee was one of only two Victorian regions that experienced a decline in TAFE fee for service enrolments in 2012.
- Courses in Wimmera Southern Mallee are becoming less time-intensive. Compared to the rest of regional Victoria, Wimmera Southern Mallee had the second highest growth in student numbers, but the lowest growth in student contact hours of study in 2012.
- Wimmera Southern Mallee had the highest growth in government subsidised apprentice and trainee enrolments of all Victorian regions in 2012.
- Forty-two providers delivered government subsidised training in Wimmera Southern Mallee in 2012, up from 34 in 2011. This was driven entirely by an increase in the number of private providers (up almost 50 per cent).
- Private RTOs are very important to meeting the training needs of Wimmera Southern Mallee. The enrolment share of private providers rose by about 5 percentage points. Wimmera Southern Mallee had the highest enrolment share of private providers of all the non-metropolitan Victorian regions in 2012 (49 per cent).
- The region's training activity is highly concentrated in the Horsham LGA, accounting for 76 per cent of government subsidised enrolments.

(ACFE Grampians Regional Council 2014)