Converting Carmichael's VET in Schools legacy: certified for university, yet not ready for the workforce

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Abstract

The seductive policy allure of delivering nationally recognised vocational education and training (VET) in senior secondary schools has remained undiminished since the mid-1980s. State, territory and federal governments have similarly found irresistible the urge to develop idiosyncratic versions of valuing, assessing and reporting student achievement. Although technical education and expanded curriculum offerings in the final years of schooling had accompanied increases in student retention, the Carmichael Report provided a national impetus to extend workplace-based vocational training reform even further. However, the outcomes expected of VET in Schools delivery have often not materialised and the space remains highly contested. Using a case study of the implementation of national VET policies in Australia's least populous jurisdiction, this presentation explores the possibility that more recent reform efforts aimed at achieving the intended outcomes have been wrongly directed at the operations of schools. By using a policy trail analysis, it will be argued that policy incoherence in the technologies of accreditation and certification, driven by contests over whose knowledge is most valid, has created an unstable foundation upon which to report highly valued industry-based skills and knowledge in the senior secondary certificate. One contrary outcome is that VET qualifications are now considered to be valid when calculating an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank but are less well regarded in terms of making young workers ready for the labour market.

Introduction

1991-92 marked a watershed in national public policy development for senior secondary schooling with the release of the findings from three extensive reviews (Employment and Skills Formation Council 1992b, Australian Education Council 1991, Mayer 1992). The so-called 'holy trinity' of Finn, Mayer and Carmichael reports provided ample raw material for policy debate, development and implementation for the rest of the decade. A common member of all three review panels was the metal worker, trade unionist and autodidact, Laurie Carmichael. The eponymous report from the committee he chaired provided an extensive and integrated set of proposals for an Australian Vocational Certificate Training System. This comprehensive program of reform paved the way for what would become known as VET in Schools (VETIS) by challenging and offering nationally consistent alternatives to the traditional senior secondary school structures, operations and qualifications. Not unexpectedly, the Carmichael Report's recommendations aroused a wide variety of responses from the various stakeholder groups.

Nearly 30 years later, VET in Schools remains a heavily contested and conceptually diverse education/training construct. Even though this disputed program has undergone a change of name to VET for School Students (VSS) in more recent times, this paper will continue to use the more commonly recognised VETIS. Perceived issues were once again laid out in the most recent national review of the VET sector (Joyce 2019, 91-101) which dedicates an entire chapter to the elaboration of delivery problems in secondary schools. In addition, the
national regulator of registered training providers identified VETiS as one of two priority target areas for increased scrutiny in 2020 (Australian Skills Quality Authority 2019, 9-10).

This paper will expand on the origins of the problematic nature of VETiS by shifting the gaze from what happens in schools towards the policies of statutory authorities. The inspiration for this refocusing of the analytic lens arises from some of the findings from a three-year long program of research, *Vocations: the link between post-compulsory education and the labour market* (Clarke 2013b, 3). While the bulk of those findings were aimed at improving delivery practice for school students, two of the reports provided tantalising observations about the role of accreditation and certification in producing the shortcomings attributed to VETiS programs (Clarke 2013a, b). In particular, the notion of a ‘problematic certificate paradigm’ has guided the framing of the policy analysis presented in this paper (Clarke 2013b, 7).

The starting point will compare the recent Joyce review findings with matters that the Carmichael Report had identified a quarter of century earlier as needing to be improved/addressed/added to through the extension of the then newly emerging national training system into schools. The Northern Territory Government agencies' response to adjustments in national VETiS policy settings will then be used as a case study of federalism. The relatively newly self-governing territory has been a consistent early responder to national programs and their associated funding sources. Frequently, the maturing Northern Territory Government used national policy as the foundation for local responses in the absence of well-established state-level agencies and bureaucratic precedents. Several theoretical perspectives on the evolution of vocational training systems and how knowledge is valued will be invoked to suggest that previously under-explored aspects of accreditation and certification have influenced VETiS outcomes in ways that are more influential than school-based interpretation and delivery of the programs that were conceived of and designed by centralised statutory authorities.

**Background**

Australia has several pervasive VET narratives. Waxing and waning public financial support for technical schools and colleges to provide training of youth for industrial employment dates back to the 1920s and has always included an expectation by individuals and industry of a state-subsidised supply of technically trained workers; thus perennially positioning VET in the role of Cinderella financially and esteem-wise when competing against schools and universities (Butlin, Barnard, and Pincus 1982, 103, 216). Likewise, contests between employers and technical colleges over who controlled the production of 'fully trained artisans' dates back to federation and 'these tensions have continued to plague Australian technical education to this day' (Butlin, Barnard, and Pincus 1982, 167).

The first national review of apprenticeships accepted ‘that apprentices are primarily to be regarded as training units, and not industrial units' and 'should be under the control of the Minister for Education or Public Instruction' (Commonwealth-State Committee of Inquiry Into Apprenticeship 1954, 26). More recently, the Joyce Review of VET (2019, 54) reiterated this tension because 'industries and businesses do not feel in control of the content and development of qualifications' and the Prime Minister has argued for new organisational structures ‘designed to give industry the opportunity to shape the training system' (Morrison 2020).
The Kangan Report (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1974) is credited with initiating the permanent insertion of the Australian Government's national perspective into Technical and Further Education policy and funding matters (Goozee 2001). This seminal report did 'not attach any importance to the precise distinctions between institutions; overlapping of courses as between secondary schools and technical colleges and as between technical colleges and colleges of advanced education could be beneficial' (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1974, 4). In addition, the Kangan Report also laid the ground rules for making decisions about the ways in which courses should be ranked and related to each other. 'The Committee is critical of any practice which uses the availability of Australian Government funds as a basis for classifying courses. In its view courses must be strictly classified according to educational criteria' (4). 'It is the view of the Committee that general and vocational education should not be artificially separated' (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1974, 6).

From the very genesis of national VET policy considerations, three enduring conflicts were identified; how federal funds would be used by states and territories, the primacy of educational criteria in valuing courses as well as a dualistic differentiation of general and vocational knowledges. These differences would become inscribed and reinforced by a vertical hierarchical ranking of qualifications frameworks that positioned VET at the bottom. VET in Schools policies would not be immune from these ideological battles.

In early 1992 the Australian Government proposed a new system of vocational education and training as part of a comprehensive and integrated suite of economic reforms; this included a Commonwealth offer to 'take full funding responsibility' for VET (Keating 1992b). With the states' and territories' rejection of the proposal, a compromise position of creating the Australian National Training Authority was eventually agreed in spite of the Prime Minister's initial threat to set up a federal vocational and training system (Goozee 2013, 353). In return for increased federal VET funding, the other jurisdictions relinquished significant amounts of policy control in favour of nationally consistent reform in areas such as mandating competency-based training and assessment, replacing state-based VET curriculum with national training packages, nationally recognised registration of training providers and consistent industry-developed standards for delivery, assessment and certification (Goozee 2013, 345, Australian National Training Authority 1994).

The grand reform plans aimed at the VET sector also coincided with the Australian Government's desire to deal with high levels of youth unemployment and relatively low rates of Year 12 completion. Senior secondary school programs and curricula were identified by the Finn, Mayer and Carmichael reports as requiring changes that aligned with the broader National Training Reform Agenda. 'By making the senior secondary curriculum more relevant to a wider range of students and by establishing a better learning environment, advances in Year 12 retention should be able to be maintained' (Employment and Skills Formation Council 1992b, 37).

The cornerstone of the Carmichael Report's recommendations was a nationally recognised system of vocational certification that was envisaged to lead to a 90 per cent Year 12 retention rate of which 90 per cent of those students would attain a level two vocational certificate and 60 per cent would achieve level three or higher certification (Employment and Skills Formation Council 1992b, vi). This Australian Vocational Certificate Training System
(AVCTS) would be independent of traditional state-based senior school certificates. It was 'an integrated, competency-based system encompassing upper secondary schooling, TAFE, private providers of vocational education and training and industry or enterprise-based training' (Employment and Skills Formation Council 1992b, 47). It was also recommended that junior high schools and senior secondary colleges be separated in each jurisdiction to replicate year 11 and 12 provision found in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (Employment and Skills Formation Council 1992b, 70).

In July 1992 Prime Minister Keating (1992a, 3) announced a large suite of federally funded initiatives aimed at reducing youth unemployment by explaining that 'a strong element of the package is the linking of vocational education and employment'. The federal government's decision to accept and introduce the Carmichael Report's main recommendation was supported by the allocation of $43.6 million over three years to develop the national entry-level AVCTS and an additional $56.3 million for pilot programs and new Career Start Traineeships over the same period (Keating 1992a, 2).

Traditional state and territory control over senior school structures, curriculum, content, delivery, assessment and certification was being challenged by the two core elements of the national reform of VET: 'the establishment of a national vocational education and training system' and the 'reform of entry-level training arrangements' (Keating 1992a, 15). By using the power of federal funding, the Commonwealth was seeking to dominate policy development and increase its direct control of programs in the same manner as had been attempted in Keating’s failed bid to take over the state-owned TAFE institutions with the intention of creating a single national VET system.

Before exploring the responses to this direct federal intervention into the states' constitutionally reserved education function, one final piece of context demonstrates the origins and philosophical drivers of the Hawke-Keating Labor Governments’ actions. The decisions to venture into school curricula, delivery, assessment and certification were not just random acts; they were carefully calculated actions to progress an agenda that was aimed at fundamentally changing the Australian economy and society. The major elements of this program were first comprehensively laid out in the report from a group of trade union leaders and international trade experts that resulted from an overseas investigative mission to selected European economies. Laurie Carmichael was a member of this group.

*Australia reconstructed: ACTU/TDC mission to western Europe* (Department of Trade, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), and Trade Development Council (TDC) 1987) made a series of tightly integrated recommendations which were summarised by mission leader Bill Kelty in his introduction to the report; 'We are about nothing less than the reconstruction of Australia' (v). The necessity of major change was also reflected in Minister John Dawkins’s opening statement on his acceptance of the report; 'It also demonstrates with chilling clarity how far Australian political culture has to evolve before simplistic, mischievous "solutions", based largely on conflict and sectional interests, are excised from the body politic' (iii).

The terms of reference for the mission identified 'tripartite mechanisms', derived from the equal contributions of governments, trade unions and businesses, as the means of policy formulation and implementation that would flow from their report's recommendations
Major chapters were dedicated to anticipating which policies from the modern northern European economies could be successfully adapted for Australian conditions in the areas of macroeconomic policy; wages, prices and incomes; trade and industry policy; labour market policies; industrial democracy and trade unions. Over the life of the Hawke-Keating Governments, a range of cohesive polices and programs were announced that would give effect to this seminal report's findings including *One Nation* (Keating 1992b) and *Working Nation* (Keating 1994) as well as the specification of government intentions contained in publications such as *Australian training reform: implications for schools* (Keating 1995).

Chapter four of *Australia reconstructed* is entitled *Labour market and training policies* (Department of Trade, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), and Trade Development Council (TDC) 1987, 103-129). This suite of observations strongly supported introducing 'active labour market policies' into Australia by creating a training system that emphasises:

- 'skill formation, flexibility, adaptability and capacity for innovation
- job placement (matching supply and demand)
- the reduction of labour market segmentation to enhance overall flexibility and equity
- payment of unemployment benefits as a last resort' (107).

In relation to the northern European secondary schools, the mission’s observations included:

- 'they played a substantial role in maintaining low levels of unemployment' (107)
- school-based training is funded by state governments (108)
- 'a series of special measures to make the transition from school to work as smooth as possible have been introduced' (110)
- 'Sweden begins its heavy investment in young people in the school system' (110)
- work-life education is broadened in the upper secondary schools where curricula include theoretical and practical vocational training (110).

The Australian Government's decision to more closely align the provision of technical and vocational training in schools to the national labour market was not just a random or isolated activity. It was only one part of a massive undertaking to modernise and renovate the country's major economic and social welfare systems. New types of industry-based knowledge and principles were enabled by tripartite agreements between federal government ministers, trade unions and national employer associations. Addressing the interrelated problems of a stagnant economy, low productivity, skills shortages in the labour market, the disappearance of low-skilled, low-wage jobs and persistently high levels of youth unemployment was to be accomplished by privileging industry-derived knowledge.
Many of the union contributors to the policy prioritisation given to industry knowledge by the Hawke-Keating Governments shared a long history with Labor politicians. They came from an inherited affiliation with working class movements, lacked university qualifications and ‘harboured a deep suspicion of formal education’; a position that complemented a more fashionable Labor left factional view that saw education as a vehicle for entrenching inequality and transmitting it from one generation to the next (Bennett 1982, 162, 172). This politically powerful and influential group of unionists had been steeped in a long-standing Australian view that technical education was ‘the working class's university’ (Kell 1994, 94) and control of this sector of education and training was a crucial to the consolidation of working conditions and industrial awards (102). The authors of Australia Reconstructed positioned education in an tripartite economic paradigm that was put into action by groups of federal and state-level ministers and their advisors operating on the certain premise ‘that education is too important to be left to educationalists’ (Kell 1994, 156).

The decisions made by the Commonwealth Government to exert increasingly direct control of areas that had previously been the intellectual province of educational bureaucracies and universities challenged the legitimacy of the traditional academic approaches to the way knowledge is understood, conveyed and authorised (for example, Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia 1964, Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission 1982). The conflict between education and industry over whose knowledge was most valid and, therefore, should be used to guide school curricula, delivery and certification was brought into the open by the actions of the federal government's acceptance of the Carmichael Report's industry-generated recommendations for a national Australian Vocational Certificate Training System.

**Theorising the federal intervention into senior secondary school certification**

Individual school VETIS results are first aggregated at state and territory levels and then turned into national statistics. These data sets are used to monitor the policies of making formal VET qualifications a part of senior secondary school curricula and certification of school-acquired learning outcomes. These jurisdictional results can be subdivided into groups such as public or private sector, qualification level, program type and selected demographic characteristics (for example, National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2019). Individual students' (and their schools') results are not made public due to privacy requirements that strictly limit data collection agencies’ types of reporting.

Exceptions are made by government ministers and schools to facilitate various awards ceremonies (e.g., Northern Territory Board of Studies 2018) or for use in promotional materials (e.g., St Patrick's Technical College 2018). The combined school-level statistics reported at state and territory level are used to represent the outcomes attributed to each jurisdiction's (or school sector's) implementation of VET in Schools policies. Unremarkably, policy specialists using the standard data collection and similarly constructed research findings position the school, in these aggregated groupings, as the basic unit of analysis in the absence of more fine-grained detail.

When it comes to tracing the lineage of the VET in Schools policy, it becomes clear that Carmichael's original proposal for the Australian Vocational Certificate Training System was the genesis of a national strategy that was laid out and promulgated by the Australian
Government. As will be shown, federal government ministers, using a variety of different organisational structures over the years, would continue to claim policy control over the nation-wide inclusion of industry endorsed and regulated qualifications into senior secondary schools. With equal enthusiasm, the state and territory government ministers’ tactical responses ensured this remained highly contested policy terrain. Well prior to Carmichael’s proposals and with the advent of self-government in the Northern Territory in 1978 and the Australian Capital Territory in 1988, the Australian Government relinquished direct operational control of schools. This was part of a broader movement to shift Australian Government activities away from direct service delivery through the use of outsourcing, privatisation and marketisation, while simultaneously focusing public service activities on policy and funding interventions (Keating 2004). The result is that the Commonwealth of Australia does not operate any schools but retains significant policy and funding responsibility/influence over VET in Schools.

The outcomes and efficacy of national VET in Schools policy is traditionally analysed by interrogating combined, anonymised and jurisdictional measures of the outputs of secondary schools operating under the control of provincial authorities. Such analyses tacitly accept that each state and territory has implemented this agenda in a distinctive manner that best suits their perceived local needs and operational realities. Australia’s federated approach to schooling means that nationally consistent data that is intended to measure specific characteristics of VET in Schools activity does not account for the jurisdictional contexts of bureaucratic arrangements, historical precedents and political economy. Ball (1993, 11) posits that the physical text of policy does not just arrive ‘out of the blue, neither does it enter a social or institutional vacuum’; it has an interpretational and representational history. Similarly, policy ‘discourses are about what can be said, and thought, but also who can speak, when, where and with what authority’ (Ball 1993, 14).

Ball (1993, 10) goes on to propose that ‘the complexity and scope of policy analysis preclude the possibility of successful single theory explanations. What we need in policy analysis is a toolbox of diverse conceptual theories’. Using this more theoretically inclusive attitude, policy can be ‘things’, commonly in the form of text, but it also can be ‘processes and outcomes’ (Ball 1993, 10-11). A simple illustration of the policy-as-text analytic approach is the Landmark Documents section of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research’s VET Knowledge Bank (for example, Zoellner 2019a). The policy-as-discourse method is exemplified in Bacchi’s (2009, 222-227) analysis of the evolution an Australian conceptualisation of lifelong learning as an individualised, self-funded pursuit of economic benefit. By using both methodologies the ‘real struggles over the interpretation and enactment of policies’ are exposed; the discourses translate ‘the crude, abstract simplicities of policy texts into interactive and sustainable practices of some sort’ by employing ‘productive thought, invention and adaptation’ (Ball 1993, 15, 12).

Guided by Ball’s multiple methodological perspective, Cort (2014, 128) uses the development of the European Union’s (EU) policy on lifelong learning as an opportunity to test the nascent ‘concept of policy trails’ to offer an alternative analytic methodology of policy processes. Like Australia’s constitutional model of a federation of separate entities with some powers granted to the centre while others reside in the states, the EU also has centralised responsibilities and nation-centric contributors to policy in the education space. Following the trails that policy must traverse exposes the various actors that are
encountered on the journey, how power is distributed and how time and space are negotiated (Cort 2014, 128). In a shift of focus, 'the analytic unit becomes the policy per se and how it is recontextualised and reproduced by actors at various sites; instead of working with policy as a top-down, bottom-up or horizontal process, it works with policy as a process distributed across sites and actors' (Cort 2014, 128).

Policy documents can be considered to be 'actors' in the sense that they have performative effects; trailing focuses on both the social actors and the structures that constrain their thoughts and actions (Cort 2014, 129). The method of policy trailing brings out the complexity of the policy as it moves from site to site and draws 'attention to the fact that policy is a process and as a process takes its form through circulation among different actors' (Cort 2014, 137). In terms of applying a different analytic lens to VET in Schools, policy trailing presents a method that changes the unit of analysis from the school (and jurisdiction) to the policy itself. It allows for a mapping of the complex and contested landscape of agency and structure that determine which types of knowledge are most valued, who supports them and how their level of influence shifts over time.

One final theoretical consideration is used in this presentation. Thelen's (2004, 35) comparison of the evolution of the skills formation systems in Japan, Germany, England and the United States is best understood as 'institutional change through ongoing political negotiation' where agency and structure are 'closely intertwined'. While she does not use the exact terminology of policy trailing, her analytic style pays close attention to many of the same characteristics such as new groups being incorporated into discussions, actors assuming different priorities, unanticipated events and shifts in the social and political environment. In particular, she describes two specific mechanisms which are used to transform institutions that deliver skills formation. The first is 'institutional layering which involves the grafting of new elements onto an otherwise stable institutional framework' (Thelen 2004, 36). The second evolutionary mechanism is 'conversion' where functions and/or roles performed are changed because of incorporation of new groups into the coalitions on which the institutions were founded.

Like Ball and Cort, Thelen draws upon multiple perspectives to analyse complex systems and their institutions based upon various actors and process assuming different roles over time in ways that sometimes promote long periods of stability or establish the environment for significant change. These actors exercise power in a Foucauldian sense – it is distributed and productive in that it establishes discourses and processes that invent new ways of dealing with change and establishing culturally and socially normative practices (Oksala 2007, 70-71). This notion of policy trailing guides the remainder of this paper as we describe the terrain covered by the two types of knowledge - education and/or industry - that have uneasily co-existed in the VET policy environment for decades and followed VET in Schools programs into the accreditation and certification of school results.

**The schools, skills and labour market entry policy trail**

Bacchi (2009, xxi) uses a policy discourse analysis to argue that 'we are governed through problematisations'. Rather than studying the problems themselves, we can best understand how and why governments take certain actions (and reject others) by analysing the way problems are created/articulated, the premises they are built upon and the effects these
constructions produce. Certainly, *Australia Reconstructed* used a long-favoured method of formulating public policy problems, the overseas study mission, to give industry knowledge primacy and to problematise vast areas of the Australian economy and society (Department of Trade, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), and Trade Development Council (TDC) 1987). The contents of this germinal report would guide most aspects of national Labor Government policy for the next decade as well as influencing the Coalition Government that followed. The perceived inadequacies of Australian secondary schooling, when compared to several European nations in relation to youth unemployment, transition to work and skill levels were further problematised by the Finn, Mayer and Carmichael reports having followed the markers laid out by the ACTU Mission to northern Europe.

A major premise guiding the production of these reports was that new tripartite industry knowledge could be used redirect school efforts to increase the entry-level skills of young people entering the labour market while correspondingly providing employers with a greater choice of potential employees. The existing dominant education knowledge that had controlled senior secondary accreditation and certification for decades was found by the mission to Europe to have created the following problems:

- Australia has been slower than most other countries in strengthening its education and skill base (Department of Trade, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), and Trade Development Council (TDC) 1987, 118)
- the low proportion of teenagers engaged in various kinds of post-secondary education is particularly worrying (118)
- these challenges imply that the education sector has to be more responsive in terms of the types of skills provided, and more flexible in the way courses are delivered (119)
- Australian business especially needs to take a structural and more active role in specifying their expectations of both young people and the institutions which educate and train them (124).

To address these types of problems the ACTU Mission recommended that 'the Government, as a matter of priority, should examine in a tripartite framework ways of ensuring that the education system provides adequate, even ambitious preparation for the world of work' (Department of Trade, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), and Trade Development Council (TDC) 1987, 125). These findings became the markers for the discourse section of the VETiS policy trail and provided the basis for the terms of reference for the ‘holy trinity’ of reports. The Finn, Mayer and Carmichael findings and recommendations delivered the actors that would guide the development, locally adapted implementation and monitoring of VETiS policy. Policy trailing focuses on the productive capacity of the exercise of power and the policy itself. The policy can be used to construct ideas/actions that are influenced by their social, economic and political contexts. Productive power is about the art of the possible and identifies problems in ways that generally have preconceived solutions that reflect the dominant discourse. In the case of VETiS, the production of school leavers’ certificates were being contested, in an exercise of performativity (Butler 1993), by the different languages
associated with the well-entrenched education knowledge or Carmichael’s re-invigoration of industry knowledge.

The Carmichael Report proposed way forward by producing a policy response that was unambiguously guided by tripartite industry knowledge. In table one, the left-hand column lists the various problematisations of the standards and levels of technical and vocational education offered in senior secondary programs that were identified in the Carmichael review and report (Employment and Skills Formation Council 1992b). A major premise was that the existing systems of certification were not enabling or accurately reporting on students’ capacity to move from school into the labour market. To achieve a more vocationally-oriented effect, a strategy of converting the traditional academically-linked qualification system to the AVCTS was chosen.

The solutions to the many problems would be found in creating and validating an industry-led parallel Australian Vocational Certificate Training System (Employment and Skills Formation Council 1992a). This would capture schools in the broader remit of reconstructing Australia’s economy, social welfare and skills development systems by extending the VET sector’s national training reform agenda (Moran 1992) into senior secondary schools. The Australian Government’s acceptance of the AVCTS proposals (Keating 1992a) formalised the terrain over which educationally endorsed qualifications and those whose validity came from the tripartite industry processes would travel and interact with each other.

In a clear sign that this contest between the different types of knowledge is far from resolved, the right-hand column of table one compares the major findings about VET in Schools contained in a recent rapid review of the VET sector commissioned by the Australian Government (Joyce 2019, 91-101). As with the ‘holy trinity’ of reports from three decades earlier, Joyce's report privileges industrial knowledge over educational knowledge. The result is rather unsurprising, if disappointing in terms of policy progress. Problematisation of the contemporary VET in Schools programs and certification is virtually identical to the issues raised in the Carmichael report.

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<tr>
<td>National competency standards provide a reference point for consistency in outcomes, quality assurance and recognition (p. 64)</td>
<td>The approach towards quality assurance varies in practice between States and Territories (p. 93)</td>
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<td>Constitutional realities remain a major factor in training reform (p. 15). There is the need for an integrated national training system (p. 20)</td>
<td>Funding arrangements and delivery requirements vary in different States and Territories (p. 93)</td>
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<td>The present data collections available for monitoring the achievement of targets addressed in this report are quite inadequate (p. 144)</td>
<td>Lack of data on the effectiveness of VET delivered to secondary students (p. 94)</td>
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<td>Training must be responsive to industry and enterprise needs (p. 16)</td>
<td>Some school VET certificates not meeting industry’s needs (p. 95)</td>
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<td>Outcomes should be nationally consistent and be accredited to facilitate their transferability (p. 16)</td>
<td>Some school VET certificates do not provide a pathway to a job (p. 95)</td>
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<td>Trainee wages are a matter for industrial parties to determine (p. 111)</td>
<td>Industrial relations arrangements linking certificate levels to wages regardless of competency/experience (p. 95)</td>
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<td>If change is to be achieved, agreement about strategic direction and process of change is necessary (p. 21)</td>
<td>Ongoing debate over the purpose of VET for secondary students (p. 95)</td>
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<td>General and vocational education are too sharply divided (p. 14)</td>
<td>Using VET as a dumping ground for less capable students (p. 96)</td>
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<td>It has been recognised for some time that the domination of the secondary curricula by higher education institutions is no longer appropriate (p. 65)</td>
<td>VET pathways less valued in schools dominated by high ATAR academic offerings (p. 96)</td>
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<td>The VET certificates should provide training pathways for the attainment of vocational competencies that are nationally recognised (p. 21)</td>
<td>Occupationally linked pathways required in school VET offerings (p. 96)</td>
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<td>Assessment and credentialing must have integrity and safeguards against abuse and distortions if it is to have the desired status (p. 29)</td>
<td>Improving VET delivery in schools (p. 97)</td>
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<td>Competency standards ensure that VET meets the needs of industry and are a quality assurance measure (p. 26)</td>
<td>Ensuring high quality standards of delivery for VET in Schools to build employer confidence in the value of VETiS (p. 98)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Many of the recommendations will depend on adequate resources being made available (p. 42)</td>
<td>VET funding in some schools experienced as an extra and not core school curriculum (p. 99)</td>
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<td>Structured training and work experience at lower levels (1-3) should articulate to further education and training (p. 48)</td>
<td>Concerns about the length and settings for school-based training (p. 100)</td>
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<td>A post-school vocational year would further develop competencies to industry/sector expectations (p. 49)</td>
<td>Certificate III might be too high a level for school students, possibly leave school and enrol with a suitable TAFE or other provider (p. 100)</td>
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<td>Each industry and possibly large enterprises develop their own vocational certificate training plans (p. 81) and European experience indicates industry groups can successfully implement training agreements (p. 83)</td>
<td>Industry Skills Organisations can set out their expectations through the qualifications development process, provide benchmark hours (p. 100) and European dual systems have enduring links between schools and local businesses providing pathways (p.101)</td>
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Table one: Comparing Carmichael’s and Joyce’s major VETiS issues.

Joyce’s suggested solutions are more tactical and programmatic when compared to the earlier strategic and systemic interventions proposed by Carmichael. However, comparing the two demonstrates that the state and territory jurisdictions’ responses to the Australian Government's foray into their area of educational responsibility did not produce dramatic accreditation and certification policy changes despite making public commitments and accepting federal funding to do so. The next section will use Cort’s policy trailing analytic
technique to demonstrate how the status quo was maintained through processes of ensuring the long-established dominance of education knowledge in determining what is valued and how senior secondary schooling results are accumulated and reported. This is done by focusing on the policy of introducing VET into senior secondary schools and certification instead of examining the rhetoric of acceptance. Because the exact date for the start of local education and training policy responsibility can be pinpointed, the Northern Territory of Australia has been used as a case study of how the contest between the two ways of knowing was conducted.

**Traversing the VETiS policy landscape in the Northern Territory**

For historical reasons that pre-date NT self-government (Zoellner 2017, 69-79), senior school certification provided by the NT Board of Studies has remained aligned with South Australian arrangements for Year 12 assessment and university entry score calculations (Australasian Curriculum Assessment and Certification Authorities 2018, 27). In response to strategic defence vulnerabilities exposed by the Japanese attacks on northern Australia during World War Two, a series of decisions were taken by the Australian Government to increase the population of the NT. Because the Commonwealth did not operate any schools, it contracted South Australia to supply and manage trained teachers for NT schools as well as the provision of the curriculum to provide education services for these new residents (Committee of Enquiry into Education in South Australia 1971, 135).

In the first step towards increased NT democracy following the war, the Australian Government established a semi-autonomous Legislative Council in 1948 in response to demands for formal local input into government decision-making. The very first piece of legislation passed in the Legislative Council established the Apprentices Board, regulated apprenticeships and specified the veracity of the qualifications (Northern Territory of Australia 1948). Education knowledge was exercised by a distant bureaucracy based in Adelaide while industry knowledge was locally developed and enacted through a legally binding tripartite agreement between the Australian Government, unions and employers.

As a result of protracted political negotiations, the Northern Territory assumed most of the constitutional functions normally reserved for the states in two tranches in 1978 and 1979 through a process commonly referred to as self-government. These faltering steps towards full statehood were enabled by Commonwealth legislation which ensured that ultimate parliamentary control remains in the hands of the Australian Government; it would require an unprecedented constitutional development for the NT to become a fully-fledged state on an equal footing with the six original states (Heatley 1979).

Self-government for the Northern Territory was turbo-charged by the residents’ generally negative view of the Commonwealth public service that had administered the jurisdiction since the early 1900s. The heads of departments and agencies were to be particularly distrusted because of their perceived role in building and maintaining their own empires and careers while ignoring the aspirations of ‘genuine’ Territorians (Zoellner 2017, 99). ‘The ministers were determined that whatever happened they would not become captives of senior public service. The public service was an organisation to be tamed, to be servant, not master’ (Weller and Sanders 1982, 11-13). The transition to self-government for senior public servants would be not easy as their lumbering lines of reporting to a distant, large
bureaucracy in Canberra disappeared and required them to be immediately responsive to an inexperienced local minister. The freshly-minted cabinet demanded quick responses and were frequently guided by populist political imperatives and a willingness to intervene in even the most mundane detail. However, the new NT Government's resolve was strong; 'Like it or not, a minister has been given licence not accorded to a public servant regardless of experience and expertise, a mandate to govern' (Chief Minister Everingham cited in Weller and Sanders 1982, 15).

There was significant resistance from a range of groups and individuals directly associated with the so-called educational establishment to handing over control of education policy and operations to the newly self-governing Northern Territory Government. The efforts of these opponents were able to delay the transfer of responsibility by one year until July 1979. These actions only served to confirm the new ministry's distrust of the education bureaucracy and increase their resolve to direct the provision of educational services at all levels. In August 1978, the first Chief Minister, Paul Everingham, addressed the NT Teachers Federation conference to reiterate the government's intent 'to start all things anew' in the design of 'an integrated system of education and training, universally available and lifelong, helping the people of the Northern Territory to develop and mature as individuals and participate effectively in the development of their society' (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977-1979).

In the nascent NT Department of Education’s first annual report the argument was made for the importance of educational knowledge and laid out for the local political class by the Secretary [Chief Executive Officer]. ‘A state-type education system has an obligation to ensure that adequate education standards are maintained’ and this was to be facilitated by a Curriculum Advisory Committee (Northern Territory Department of Education 1980, 1). The committee sat inside the department in order to ‘advise the Secretary on the curricula offered in schools, and on matters related to the accreditation and assessment of curricula’ (Northern Territory Department of Education 1980, 1).

However, this policy space for accreditation and assessment of learning in the NT was not vacant. The successors of the Apprenticeships Board had their own legislated responsibilities which included ‘determination or approval of certification or accreditation of training courses for industry which involves the monitoring of students’ and ‘determination or approval of the training content for industry’ (Northern Territory Industry Training Commission 1981). Reflecting further legislative changes that increased the remit of industry-based knowledge this re-named regulator also gained ‘responsibility for the evaluation and accreditation of TAFE courses of study’ a year later (Northern Territory Vocational Training Commission 1983, 2).

The NT Board of Studies (NTBOS) was established in 1984 as a result of provisions made in the Education Act (Melbourne Graduate School of Education 2020). In 1985 the NTBOS subsumed the role of the Curriculum Advisory Committee and operated in an advice-giving capacity inside the Department of Education. The continuing formal arrangement with the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia enabled the introduction of a new range ‘school-assessed accredited courses into the NT’s five largest high schools in the previous year’ (Northern Territory Department of Education 1986, 8). This step had been taken because ‘many student entering Year 12 are not seeking university entrance
qualifications but do wish to study subjects which have community recognition for employment purposes' and the school-assessed courses 'are generally more practically oriented' and 'have attracted many more senior students to remain at school' (Northern Territory Department of Education 1986, 8).

The two major antagonists were now both travelling on the same sections of the Northern Territory's policy trail with the locus of control of educational knowledge being transferred from South Australia to the NTBOS. By claiming a remit that extended into preparing school leavers for employment, the new travellers were brought into direct competition with the Vocational Training Commission (VTC). The former Apprentices Board's long lineage as the representative of industry knowledge and the related political influence they could exert was now under challenge from the same education establishment that had been so problematic at the time of self-government deliberations. As it turns out, the NT Government took a series of decisions that certainly muddied the trail for the keepers of industry knowledge.

The VTC was abolished in 1984 and its functions were sequentially placed in three different government departments and ministries in relatively quick succession, each of which were under constant attack from the Education Department's senior bureaucrats in their quest to gain control of a total education and training agenda (Zoellner 2019b, 139-143). The general feeling was that industry knowledge was being side-lined by being forced into government bureaucracies while the independent and expert status that the industry commissions had previously enjoyed was now bestowed upon the NT Board of Studies and its education knowledge base.

However, this would change in 1992 in response to national changes in VET policy and the associated funding agreements between the Australian Government, the states and territories. The major elements of the National Training Reform Agenda (Moran 1992) that would impact on secondary schools were detailed in the Finn, Mayer and Carmichael reports as previously described. The major local change in the NT policy landscape would come from re-instating the former status of industry knowledge through the creation of the stand-alone NT Employment and Training Authority (NTETA) (1993). This was done because 'it is now recognised that for too long, too much emphasis has been placed on the gaining of University-based qualifications and skills by our young people and too little placed on the development of vocationally oriented qualifications' (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 1993, 1).

The new authority’s goals included establishing a competency-based national training system in the NT built upon the key objective to ‘develop and implement a national framework for the recognition of skills, accreditation, credit transfer and articulation (and including articulation with other education sectors)’ (2). Industry knowledge was reclaiming control over accreditation and the issuance of qualifications in order to ‘increase public recognition of the value of vocational education and training’ (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 1993, 5). Implicit in these statements was a general critique of the education establishment’s dominance of the knowledge contest in recent years and a more specific complaint about the nature and usefulness to employers of the courses sanctioned by the NT Board of Studies.
In line with national trends, the 1980s saw an increasing number of students staying at school in Years 11 and 12 in the Northern Territory. In response the NT Government considered options to better cater for a 'much wider range of interest and abilities' by increasing the diversity of NT accredited [technical] courses and by improved cooperation with the Darwin Institute of Technology (DIT) (Working party on high schools and secondary colleges 1985, 51). This included increasing the access to courses that had previously been considered to be post-school options. It was envisaged these could be offered in senior secondary colleges in the major urban areas. Specific proposals included:

- DIT staff teaching of some modules for full credit in secondary schools
- shared course development leading to joint DIT and school accreditation and certification
- joint delivery of pre-vocational trade courses by school and TAFE staff
- secondary college students participating in traineeships in non-trade areas offered by TAFE (Working party on high schools and secondary colleges 1985, 51).

In further course diversification developments, the NT Board of Studies introduced a category called 'endorsed senior courses' in 1991; these came from 'other recognised authorities or institutions' and 'may include TAFE courses, industry-based and approved courses, approved interstate courses and nationally approved courses'. In 1992 there were five endorsed courses in addition to 246 stage one [NTBOS] accredited courses and 285 stage two [SA semester length] units (Russell 1994, 71-72). In general stage one courses were to be undertaken in Year 11 and stage two in Year 12. While there is no indication of the volume and frequency of usage, it was noted that over 70 SACE (NT) courses could be given credit in a wide range of TAFE courses and that credit transfer arrangements from TAFE courses to the SACE (NT) were also in place (Russell 1994, 82). The NT also reported a number of unresolved issues that included charges for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), accounting for funding from different sources, lack of industry 'coherence about needs and aims' as well as timetabling matters at TAFE (90).

The way in which these problems are represented by the NTBOS is particularly instructive in terms of defining the relative validity of the two forms knowledge. Industry knowledge is labelled incoherent and the matters of timetabling are sheeted home to the non-school sector rather than in secondary schools with their strict term dates and comparatively short daily hours of operations.

Due to changes in the South Australian Certificate of Education, the Northern Territory Board of Studies assumed responsibility for all year 11 courses in 1992 because 'in the NT, policies and procedures are much firmer for year 11 and in fact for all year levels' (Northern Territory Board of Studies 1991, 1); 'our system will be tighter in terms of central approval of courses and monitoring assessment of student achievement'. This circular also describes the pathways to higher education available to NT students, but does not mention pathways to TAFE (Northern Territory Board of Studies 1991, 2). This claim of educational superiority on the part of the NTBOS was a direct reaction to the establishment of NTETA and its incursions into accreditation and certification.

In response to the NT Cabinet’s decision to implement the Finn, Mayer and Carmichael reports’ national policies and receive the associated federal funding, the NT Board of Studies
(responsible for school certification) and NTETA (responsible for VET certification) jointly published a credit transfer handbook in order to facilitate ‘a wider range of further education and training pathways, to promote the uptake of training courses and to recognise prior learning so that duplication is avoided’ (Northern Territory Board of Studies and Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 1992, i). It was also stated in the hand book that ‘secondary schools and colleges are encouraged to examine ways and means by which more vocational options can be offered in years 11 and 12’ (31). Schools and colleges wishing to offer TAFE courses had to apply to NTETA for provider registration, apply for approval to offer individual units and also seek approval from the NT Department of Education (31). In practice, these three processes were intensely time-consuming, cumbersome, unrelated to each other and generally perceived by school-based staff to have been established as barriers to the introduction of competency-based VET into schools.

By 1993, the various recognition agreements between the alternative NT certification authorities had formalised a previously loose set of cooperative arrangements between VET providers and schools that gave senior secondary students the opportunity to study and receive credit in both systems in pre-vocational courses, automotive, engineering, metal work and rural studies. The largest senior college in Darwin had also become a registered TAFE provider in its own right. In addition, there were several Carmichael school-based pilots being conducted in Darwin and Alice Springs and it is reported (Russell 1994, 90) that ‘all courses involved in the AVCTS pilots are accredited or endorsed by the NT Board of Studies for Stage One [Year 11] of the SACE(NT)’.

By the mid-1990s the NT Board of Studies claimed responsibility to provide ‘leadership consistent with the best educational ideals’ (Northern Territory Board of Studies 1996, 1.2). Its functions included advising the Secretary of the Education Department on policies and guidelines for academic, general and vocational education for senior secondary schooling (1.8). The Board’s recognition policy principles included promoting the ‘convergence of general and vocational education’ provided that ‘the integrity of the NTCE is maintained’ and ‘recognition takes place within the framework of the NTCE’ (Northern Territory Board of Studies 1996, 3.7 and 3.8). The Board’s intention was unambiguous – VET courses had to be made to fit with educational imperatives in order to receive recognition in NTBOS certification processes. One other notable characteristic of the Board’s language is that it is all but identical to that used in the Kangan review of TAFE in promoting the convergence of the two types of education along with the importance of classifying courses on the basis of educational criteria.

In its 1996 annual report the NT Department of Education (1997, 87) described ‘providing VET options for senior secondary students continued to be an important consideration for many schools during 1996. Supporting them was a major departmental priority’. However, the NTBOS had adopted a rather different stance in claiming superiority of the knowledge it curates. ‘If VET in Schools is to be successful, it is important to convince parents and students that it is an attractive pathway to or alternative to, higher education’ (Northern Territory Board of Studies 1998, 7). More significantly, the NTBOS was clearly hedging its bets on the future of VETiS.

While the board is keen to see VET in Schools grow, and for school students to complete the first stages of apprenticeships at school, there is a great deal of
work to be done to change the general perception that VET in Schools courses are less attractive than general and academic courses. There is a need to increase student demand to make it viable to offer these courses (Northern Territory Board of Studies 1998, 21).

After all, the NTBOS had what it felt to be a large and perfectly suitable range of courses already approved and available for schools to offer to students who were not aiming for university entrance. These alternatives to pre-university routes had been developed inside the educational bureaucracy and were tailored to be offered in school timetable-friendly semester-length units as well as time-served certification arrangements, in direct opposition to the industry-designed competency-based training promoted by NTETA. Subjects for senior secondary students included business, health, physical education, home economics, computer education, technical studies and career education which included structured workplace learning options (Northern Territory Board of Studies 1998, 34-40). If off-the-job accredited VET modules were to count for the NT senior secondary certificate they had to be grouped into 50-60 hours of classroom instruction or 120 hours of structured workplace learning supported by ‘sufficient documentation of achievement and time spent’ (Northern Territory Board of Studies 1999a, 13). It is also noted that the NTBOS would give a maximum credit of six units out of a total of 22 units counted towards achieving the NT senior school certificate.

In January 1997, the South Australian Certificate of Education (NT) was replaced by the NT Certificate of Education (NTCE). Except for the name, the two were identical in all aspects (Northern Territory Board of Studies 1995, 1). Announcing the change in name of the senior school certificate some 18 months before the actual change reflected the heavily politicised authority wielded by education ministers in the NT and their political calculations of how policy changes would influence the less than 2,000 voters enrolled in each of the miniscule electorates. The previously mentioned desire of politicians to retain tight control over education bureaucrats was partially driven by ‘the strong media interest in education in the NT’ that focused on ‘potential conflicts’ (Russell 1994, 69).

This meant that issues could become controversial quickly because a very small group of electors could exert a powerful influence if they were dissatisfied with government initiatives. Claiming adherence to the highest educational standards and putting the NT into the title of the senior school certificate were all part of a comprehensive and carefully managed set of political considerations. Regardless of the publicly announced intention to introduce the AVCTS into NT schools, the political calculation was that offering academic excellence and clear pathways into higher education would better translate into votes when compared to offering less-esteemed VET qualifications in schools.

The NT Board of Studies (1999b, 4) recognition policy did not allow credit for non-Board courses at year 12 level to be used in the determination of a tertiary entrance rank. In addition, schools were still required to package VET qualifications into semester or year length units and to specify the hours of study undertaken, i.e., competency-based assessment had to be converted to time-served arrangements (Northern Territory Board of Studies 1999b, 5). The various processes established by the NTBOS, the Education Department and NTETA were arduous, complex and frequently opaque to parents, school communities and business groups. These procedures reinforced some Opposition
politicians' distrust of the bureaucratic leadership and demonstrated their ability to deflect the national Carmichael-inspired policy directions that had been accepted by the Northern Territory Government Cabinet. The battle over which knowledge was more valid and valued was encapsulated in the actions of these two government-sanctioned bodies. The NT Board of Studies defended a perceived primacy of educational knowledge by evoking notions of academic rigour, high standards, quality and ensuring pathways to university against NTETA’s VET-based intruders who were seeking to re-establish their historic roles of accreditation and certification based on the knowledge generated by employers and industry.

However, the recalcitrance on the part of the NTBOS incrementally weakened over the years; for example, by 2005 students could count up to 12 units of VET in their 22-unit NTCE pattern (Northern Territory Board of Studies 2006, 30). The NTBOS senior secondary certification processes have continued to evolve to the point that in 2018 the requirement for students to achieve their NT Certificate of Education and Training by gaining a total of 200 credits, '160 of which can be gained through recognition arrangements for VET in the NT CET'; structured workplace learning is not mandated for NT CET completion; 'completed VET qualifications at Certificate III level or above can be used as recognised study towards an ATAR' (Australasian Curriculum Assessment and Certification Authorities 2018, 28-29).

This gradual change from bureaucratic inertia and outright resistance to the recognition of VETI IS qualifications in the NT’s senior secondary certificate was facilitated by the demise of formal institutional support for industry knowledge by the NT Government. NT ETA was progressively sidelined from the debate until it was disbanded as a separate operational authority in 2004 by Labor Education Minister Stirling (Northern Territory of Australia 2004). The minister had portfolio responsibility for both industry skills and education and when Labor gained government for the first time in the history of NT self-government, one of his first major decisions was to amalgamate education and training functions into a single agency led by an educationalist.

Stirling was a strong believer in the potential benefits of VET in Schools and had developed a strong disdain for NT ETA’s complex processes and perceived affiliations to the now opposition Country Liberal Party (pers comm). Stirling was also convinced that the increasing levels of recognition of VET qualifications in the NT CET (he had insisted on adding the word training into the name) demonstrated an increased acceptance of VETI S. As Joyce points out, this rather optimistic view has not been widely accepted. It seems likely that the minister was strongly influenced by a range of advisory personnel that focused on a series of school-based programs (for example, Taminmin College 2019) rather than the policy itself when declaring successful acceptance of VETI S in the broader community.

The NT Training Commission was established by the conservative government when it was elected in 2016 (Northern Territory of Australia 2016) but a returned Labor government disbanded this body in 2018 and positioned responsibility for training in a business-oriented government department, much as had happened in the late 1980s (Northern Territory of Australia 2018). The net result is that in 2020, education knowledge is promulgated through the legally established, broadly-based membership of the NT Board of Studies while industry knowledge resides inside a government department which leaves business and industry
interests without any formal advisory or other independent body to provide advice directly to the relevant minister or cabinet.

By following the VETiS policy trek across the Northern Territory’s political landscape, the educational establishment’s knowledge has asserted its dominance over the industry-sanctioned form of knowledge that had been envisaged for schools in the Carmichael Report’s Australian Vocational Certificate Training System. The NTBOS provides ‘advice to the Minister for Education and the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Education about curriculum, assessment, reporting and certification for all Northern Territory schools’ (Northern Territory Board of Studies 2019, 1) and has progressively enveloped any perceived incompatibilities of the VET system. In 2018, 677 or 29 per cent of student completers of the NTCET used VET and in a rather oddly presented statistic, it is noted that 393 students ‘who competed the NTCET would not have done so without VET’ (Northern Territory Board of Studies 2019, 35). This further demonstrates that the VET path is a viable option for students, if it is undertaken under circumstances determined to be suitable to and under the control of the Board of Studies.

The Northern Territory VETiS policy trail did not come into being as a context-free entity. As demonstrated in the first national report into apprenticeships (Commonwealth-State Committee of Inquiry Into Apprenticeship 1954), the states and [eventually] territories have always jealously guarded post-school education and training policy-making and operations that was only breached by offers of Australian Government funding to support TAFE (Whitelock 1974, Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1974). VETiS came about through a similar pattern of events; it was the promise of funding from the national government that was used to facilitate the mandating of industry knowledge into secondary school course accreditation and certification as proposed in the Carmichael Report that had stimulated the NT ministers into action and their local version of VETiS accreditation and certification.

Some of the national influences on the policy trail

From the earliest days of NT residents’ involvement in public policy decision-making post-World War Two, industry knowledge dominated the scene through the apprenticeship system. However, because of the political enthusiasm and the general public’s pride generated by self-government, the capacity to take control over educational knowledge became highly valued. The importance of retaining local and education-based control of accreditation and certification has relatively recently been re-iterated:

The Chief Executive Officers of the state and territory statutory authorities that have legislated responsibility to certify ‘student achievement in post-compulsory schooling’ report that they have included recognition of VET undertaken by secondary students since 1998, ‘in accordance with the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) National Agreement’ (Australasian Curriculum Assessment and Certification Authorities 2018, 4). They also describe that each state and territory ‘Senior Secondary Certificates of Education, students are able to gain credit for Vocational Education and Training (VET) in meeting the requirements of the certificate’ (9).
Carmichael’s revolutionary Australian Vocational Certificate Training System has become a mildly interesting footnote in Australian VET history. As for the industry knowledge that underpinned the AVCTS, the states and territories have progressively ceded control over VET accreditation and certification to national bodies that have been brought into and out of existence by the Australian Government (for example, Australian National Training Authority 1993, Skills Australia 2009, Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2012, Australian Industry and Skills Committee 2016, Australian Skills Quality Authority 2016). Organisations such as these were first mobilised to implement the National Training Reform Agenda throughout the 1990s (Allen Consulting Group 1994, Australian National Training Authority 2001) and then to facilitate the operations of the National Training System (for example, National Skills Standards Council 2013, Australian Industry and Skills Committee 2016). As these national bodies outlive their political and policy value, new ones are created as we are currently witnessing with the National Skills Commission (House of Representatives 2020) and the National Careers Institute (Department of Education 2020). As commonly occurs, when the analytic focus is upon the life cycles of these institutions, the considerably more influential policy decision-making and drivers of activity become obscured; as is the education vs industry knowledge contest for validity in the case of VETiS.

The Northern Territory’s unique public policy history allowed it to be an early adopter of national VET policies, particularly if funding was attached to adopting new policy directions. This relatively nimble approach also fed the education versus industry knowledge contest in another way. School education had become locally controlled, claimed to have very high standards and became a source of pride due to ‘dramatic improvements since self-government in 1978’ demonstrating that Territorians could operate to high standards on the national education scene (Australian Education Council 1991, 122). On the other hand, the previously superior position held by the advocates for industry knowledge was removed from direct local control and delegated to distant national institutions. This change in fortunes for VET expertise and VET in Schools influence was also accompanied by never-ending bouts of blame for failure being attributed to the national bodies and continual battles over cost-shifting between jurisdictions (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs Taskforce on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Schools 2001, 58 and 60).

Through the 1990s and the first two decades of the 2000s there have literally been dozens of reviews and reports into VET in Schools. The relentless political and policy appeal of being able to encourage VETiS in ways that are ‘in response to industry needs and will benefit employers through the provision of young people with greater and more relevant skills’ (Australian National Training Authority 1997) remains just as strong currently as it did to Carmichael. This is exemplified by products such as the lists of skills published by the Business Council of Australia (2020) which purport to be necessary for young people to demonstrate in order to find success in the labour market. Such documents are clearly based on industry knowledge.

Generally, the contested territory of which type of knowledge is most valuable has not been exposed to high levels of scrutiny. This is because the major national VETiS policies, inquiries and reviews have progressively shifted their focus towards statistical reports on students’ journeys through the senior secondary years of schooling, i.e., years 11 and 12 for most students. Even before the Carmichael Report, the Australian Education Council (1991,
was taking note of ‘recent cooperative arrangements between secondary schools and TAFE colleges to broaden the range of studies at senior secondary level’ and had established its own ‘Working Party on Links Between Schools and TAFE’ in order to gather and analyse more data on these types of interactions.

Keating (1995, viii) describes how the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) set in place the new [employment] entry-level Australian Vocational Training System\(^1\) (AVTS) and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) which ‘cemented a role for schools in training’. He revisited the introduction of the AVTS into schools three years later and noted that ‘the catalysts for training reform in Australia were the growth in youth unemployment and the rise in national debt’ (Keating 1998, 12). In particular, the state and territory governments responded by adopting policies and the increased costs of increasing school retention rates and to encourage the expansion of higher education participation which was funded by the Australian Government (Keating 1998, 15). Both outcomes could be quantified and easily measured which shifted attention and public scrutiny from the policy-making role exercised by the legislated authorities to school outcomes.

As demonstrated in the Northern Territory’s VETiS policy trail, which included school-assessed subjects created for employment purposes, Keating (1998, 56) describes the impact of ‘common and relatively academic frameworks for senior secondary certificates’ that were believed by the local policy-makers to be capable of catering for the entire 16-17 age cohort; ‘as a consequence linkages or potential linkages with VET were weakened’. The net result was that the combination of closing technical high schools, increasing Higher Education places and the academic orientation of secondary education simultaneously accelerated the drift towards more academic courses (Keating 1998, 5 and 56) and ensured that ‘the capacity of schools to provide quality VET programs has been a contentious issue’ (61).

By the turn of the century, it had become apparent that even though the states and territories had signed up and received federal funding for the implementation of the Australian Vocational Certificate Training System, they had no real policy intention of replacing their own school certification systems. The national policy environment had moved on as the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) had matured and provided coordinated national leadership in the VET sector. In a review of ANTA’s VETiS program funding, it was prefaced with the claim that since the mid-1970’s ‘vocational education became marginal to schools’ mainstream provision’ (Allen Consulting Group 2000, 9). This review typified the emergence of focusing on schools and their outcomes as the best place to understand how VETiS policy had impacted schools’ outcomes and diverting attention from the policy itself.

The following selection of issues canvassed in the ANTA review demonstrate the subtle shift in the milestones, i.e., making schools to focus of responsibility, that were being used on the VETiS policy trail (Allen Consulting Group 2000):

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\(^1\) This was the renamed program formerly known as the AVCTS; removing ‘certificate’ helped shift attention to schools instead of the accreditation and certification authorities on their guidance and influence on the policy trail.
• nationally there were 137,000 VETiS students in 1999 (p. 10)

• 90 per cent of secondary schools provided VET programs to students (p. 11)

• ‘Despite notable exceptions, VET in Schools still sits somewhat outside mainstream school timetabling procedures’ (p. 35)

• ‘There is a perception among students and employers that non-school RTOs provide better courses and more credible qualifications’ (p. 54)

• ‘One of their concerns is that if credit is given in school towards a relevant certificate, the construction industry may be obliged to pay second year wages to former students who do not actually have the skills and experience of that level (p. 59)

• ‘However, the extent to which VET in Schools has been absorbed into school budgets is limited and uneven’ (p. 65)

• ‘There is little evidence that VET has replaced many, if any, traditional school offerings’ (p. 69) and

• ‘Related to this is how success is measured for schools. If a school student participates in VET but does not complete because he or she transfers to TAFE or gets a job, the school is most likely to have lost this enrolment and funding is adjusted accordingly (emphasis in original)’ (p. 73).

Even Prime Minister Howard’s office decided to intervene into the VETiS area by establishing another taskforce. It also chose to construct the problem in a way that obscured the policy trail and focused on schools – a characteristic that has remained in place ever since. This expert group found an unresponsiveness to the future needs of young people was exacerbated by ‘the uneven way that many schools have acknowledged that vocational education and broader life skills need to be an integral part of the curriculum’ (Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce 2001, 9).

This taskforce made numerous suggestions about ways to improve the outcomes produced by schools including the creation of a skills passport, an employability skills framework, a world-class national career information system on the internet and better career guidance. Nearly 20 years later these same themes were being revisited by another national review into senior secondary pathways (Education Council 2019).

As for VETiS, the Prime Minister’s Taskforce (2001, 28) called for a ‘paradigm shift’ by proposing:

• increasing the skill base of more young Australians to allow movement ‘directly from school to employment or further education and training’

• ‘establishing arrangements for VET assessments to contribute directly to tertiary entrance scores’ and

• ‘raising the status of VET in schools’.
Discussion

In reporting some of the results from a three-year long examination of VETiS, Clarke (2013a, 2014) continued the well-established analysis of schools and their outcomes by using large data sets and qualitative input from a wide-variety of contributors. As previously found by the Prime Minister’s Taskforce, she reports that ‘Australian schools are approaching the provision of vocational programs in a variety of different ways’ characterised by ‘participating in minimal VET in addition to a mostly academic senior secondary program’ (Clarke 2013a, 33). Although supported by better statistics, most of the conclusions drawn in the various reports from this more recent long-term research project would be familiar to anyone who has been involved in the delivery of vocational education and training in secondary schools over the past 30 years. This does not diminish the value of the research and conclusions drawn but does suggest that the analytic focus on schools over the past two decades of trying to realise the ambitious and politically attractive benefits of VETiS has been misplaced.

One of four core concepts reported by Clarke (2014, 7) ‘is that it is important to acknowledge the role that VET in Schools plays in reproducing existing socio-economic inequality’. This theme was also taken up in the recent review of the senior secondary curriculum in New South Wales which found that instead of serving as a ‘vehicle for educational achievement, the curriculum operates as a system to reinforce social status’ (Roberts, Dean, and Lommatsch 2019, 4). ‘This system increasingly funnels low socio-economic, and non-metropolitan, students into subjects with lower average achievement levels and into vocational education subjects’ (4). Again, these observations about school outcomes would be familiar to some of those on the left of the political spectrum who saw ‘education as a vehicle for entrenching inequality and transmitting it from one generation to the next’ because ‘schools teach two principal things: competition and failure’ (Bennett 1982, 72). This line of thought suggests that focusing upon schools and a singular program like VETiS will be missing the larger context in which schools are situated.

Crucially, Clarke’s brief description offers an alternative path through the conceptual maze and its cyclical repetition of the same findings being produced from research into VETiS that is conducted through the lens of the school as the unit of analysis. By evoking the concept of a ‘problematic certificate paradigm’ the contest for validity and truth that has been fought between education knowledge and industry knowledge is re-exposed. There appears to be a simultaneous acknowledgment of, on the one hand, the limited value of both entry-level VET certificates and senior secondary certificates in the labour market and, on the other, an increasing focus on the attainment of these certificates as the key policy measure of effective youth transition (Clarke 2014, 7).

This short critique of the accreditation and certification leads back to an exploration of the ways in which the education-industry knowledge contest for supremacy has traversed the policy trail and, it is argued, where the real determinants of VETiS outcomes reside. Not unexpectedly, this competition manifests itself in the broader VET sector as well. Harris (2020, 5) neatly summarises the ongoing battle between what Kaye Schofield described as VET’s ‘training tribe and education tribe’ whose policy ascendancy varies over time while the
contest between them remains alive and well. Ryan (2019, 7) has also described the policy crusaders as being involved in 'the perennially unresolved training or education dichotomy' that juxtaposes the two value systems as the first being 'narrow and instrumental, the other broader, focused on social justice and individual self-development' (p. 1).

Striking out from a training and industry knowledge base, Carmichael's intervention into schooling by advocating the Australian Vocational Certificate Training System managed to offend just about every stakeholder in the education system of the early 1990s:

- Teacher unions by recommending senior secondary colleges
- Accreditation and certification authorities by proposing alternative vocational certificates
- Boards of Studies by introducing vocational qualifications frameworks and competency-based training into schools
- Universities by intervening in admissions processes
- Education departments by elevating industry knowledge to being equal or even superior to education knowledge.

In fact, challenging the existing structures and processes in schools and the preparation of new types of worker that would be required in the reconstructed socio-economic future of Australia was the whole point of the exercise. The agenda was to rebuild many of the nation’s institutions and schools were only one relatively small consideration in the process of prioritising the tri-partite form of industry knowledge into most facets of the social economy (Department of Trade, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), and Trade Development Council (TDC) 1987). The Finn, Mayer and Carmichael reports were quite purposely targeting the insertion of a new training regime into schools that would be aligned with other economic and social welfare changes.

Thelen’s (2004, 31) research into how national training systems evolve proposes that:

The state played a crucial role in establishing the power of key actors, in influencing the kinds of coalitions that were likely to come together and thus shaping the landscape on which institutions were being constructed.

Education and training ministers as a collective agreed to implement Carmichael’s AVCTS in November 1994 (Keating 1995, 3). One result was that the state and territory accreditation and certification authorities found that they were being transformed by the ‘political realignments and the incorporation of new groups whose role in the system was unanticipated at the time of their creation’ (Thelen 2004, 34). They would be required to make institutional adjustments to accommodate powerful new actors in order ‘to address new imperatives, both economic and political’; this represents a model of institutional change through ongoing political negotiation’ (Thelen 2004, 35). As shown by the description of the education-industry contest in the NT, this process is continuous and does not have a fixed endpoint as the relative influence of the two knowledges and the policies they induce waxes and wanes.
In describing two major methods of achieving institutional change in national vocational training systems, Thelen (2004, 36) proposes that:

A second mechanism through which institutions evolve is through conversion, as the adoption of new goals or the incorporations of new groups into coalitions on which institutions are founded can drive a change in function these institutions serve or the role they perform.

Carmichael’s preferred method for implementing the AVCTS in the schooling sector was an example of this type of conversion. Given Carmichael’s critical role in each of the ‘holy trinity’ of reports on secondary schooling and his involvement in reconstructing many of Australia’s social and economic institutions, this is not a surprising approach. Traditional schooling and its valorisation of university pathways was perceived to need radical change in response to changed socio-economic circumstances. As time has shown, the various certification authorities and schools were able to avoid a total conversion of their traditional academically focused missions, although there are some limited examples of individual schools that have converted to a more vocational orientation (for example, St Patrick's Technical College 2018).

In spite of Carmichael’s intended process and outcome, the current placement of VETiS in senior secondary certificates and in school programs is described by Thelen’s (2004, 35) other method of systemic evolution - layering - which ‘involves the grafting of new elements onto an otherwise stable institutional framework’. As demonstrated by the NT’s example, VET qualifications have moved from being explicitly resisted in the 1980s to being counted for up to 80 per cent of the studies required to achieve the NT Certificate of Education and Training and at Certificate III level or above being used to calculate an ATAR (Australasian Curriculum Assessment and Certification Authorities 2018, 27-29). Instead of capitulating to Carmichael attempts at conversion, the policy trail lead to the layering of VETiS into the existing senior secondary school certificate and, consequently, school programs with variable levels of priority. Those who use education knowledge as their frame of reference realised they could not completely reject the claims to legitimacy by those who use industry knowledge as their reference point. VETiS policy has too many politically attractive features to be ignored by accreditation and certification authorities, but they were able to see off the attempts at conversion by resorting to the layering of VET qualifications into existing certification processes and on terms determined by the holders of education knowledge.

Foucault (2008, 30-36) describes a process to explain how government’s behaviour can be explained; ‘veridiction [is] a statement that is true according to the world view of the particular individual, rather than objectively true’. He went on to explain that technologies of the state such as ‘educational qualifications and accreditation, locate individuals in chains of allegiance and dependency, empowering some to direct others and obliging others to comply’ (Rose 1999, 8). The innovations that arise from using these technologies ‘have frequently been made in order to cope with local, petty and even marginal problems’ and at times ‘they have involved the ad hoc utilisation combination and extension of existing explanatory frameworks and techniques’ (Rose 1999, 9).

By shifting the location of policy analysis back to the various commissions, boards, authorities and departments that give effect to political decisions we can better understand
why it has been so difficult to achieve the skills, employment and economic benefits attributed to offering more VET in schools. The veridiction of education knowledge has relegated industry knowledge subservient. This current level of superiority even allows for highly questionable truth claims such as the following to be made: ‘ACACA affirms that VET delivered to secondary students is the same as VET delivered to non-secondary students’ (Australasian Curriculum Assessment and Certification Authorities 2018, 12).

Conclusion

The Northern Territory’s assumption of self-government provided a unique opportunity to explore the policy contest between education and industry knowledges because the starting point of the policy trail could be clearly identified. The process of veridiction was conducted in a political and institutional environment that was quite removed from schools; perceptions of truth were being pitted against each other in their fight for the attention of their political masters in pursuit of bureaucratic control and agenda setting that can be best exposed by focusing in the policy itself rather than the behaviours it produces at a distance.

Education knowledge has again dominated the ways the state-level accreditation and certification authorities’ view the world and, consequently, the broad acceptance of the performative nature of how their policies impact upon other parts of the broader socio-economic landscape. As a result, it should not be surprising that higher esteem is given to university admission as a preferred destination for students as it results from the dominant source of veridiction. The politically determined and legislated pre-eminence given to locally determined education knowledge and the institutions which facilitate its journey along the policy trail stand in stark contrast to its fellow traveller. Industry knowledge is fractured, contested at every level of the VET system and has been progressively transformed into a complicated set of distant, national process that are frequently felt to be unintelligible to employers, parents and students.

The policy trail that was travelled to get to this point was equally signposted by the same political practitioners that have prioritised education knowledge’s control over VET in Schools accreditation and certification. The way in which industry knowledge has been dealt with when compared to the alternative suggests that claims that VET is equal to university have not been seriously supported by policy-making and that Carmichael-inspired conversions of institutional behaviours will be required to make it so. Focusing on the statistical outcomes of schools will not identify the necessary steps that will be required to propel the VET sector to equality – if indeed that is the desired policy outcome.

So why have things not changed for VETiS? This policy analysis argues that we have been looking and intervening in the wrong places (i.e., schools) when the real causes lie at the policy level and particularly with accreditation and certification authorities and the politically determined mandates they have sought and been given. By not using policy as the unit of analysis through policy trailing, schools and course/qualification completions became a way to keep score in the competition between the alternative knowledges rather than the cause of VETiS problems. By returning to analysis of the policies, the validity accorded to education knowledge in reporting VETiS qualifications explains how VET can be used to obtain an ATAR for admission to university even though it was never really designed to
perform that role. The workforce preparation role of VETiS qualifications has been converted to the problematic paradigm of higher education access.

On the other hand, the veridiction of industry knowledge that was intended to be the outcome of studying VET qualifications while at school has not been universally valued by employers in their recruitment of young persons into the workforce. One can only speculate that Carmichael would be disappointed, but possibly not surprised in the absence of his attempted conversion of certification processes, that the layering of VET qualifications into senior secondary school certificates has not better prepared young people for entry into the labour market and made the workforce ready.

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