



**Victorian
Skills Authority**



**International
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Skills
Institute**



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Practice-based Learning : International best practices in work-based learning and industry collaboration in VET | Ani Tom Vellaramkunnel, 2023



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1. Acknowledgments

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The Victorian Skills Authority works in partnership with the International Specialised Skills Institute by funding the VET International Practitioner Fellowships. The Fellowship program focuses on developing opportunities within the VET sector to assist in building an Education State in Victoria that produces excellence and reduces the impact of disadvantage. In addition, the program is funded to support the priorities of Skills First, including developing capacity and capability, innovative training practices and increasing teacher quality within the VET sector as well as building industry capability and developing Victoria's current and future workforce.

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2. Executive Summary

Today's world of work is looking for young people who are skilled and competent to meet the challenges and complexities of modern workspaces. Vocational training and education is all about getting the learners ready for the challenging world of work. Providing opportunities to practise their skills at real workplaces during the learning period is critical for current Vocational Education and Training (Behreus, et al., 2022). As a result, the recognition for work-based learning as an effective approach to Vocational Education and Training (VET) is increasing worldwide.

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The concept of work- based learning refers to learning that take place through undertaking real work. It is argued that the quality and relevance of the VET course will be higher when we use work-based approaches because the skills of the learner are developed through involving them in the production of real goods and services, (Sweet, 2013)

As work-based learning needs real workplaces, the role of the industry in work-based learning is very crucial. In other words, work-based learning is a great learning strategy of closely involving industries and employers in Vocational Education and training in a beneficial way for both the employers and learners.

The aim of undertaking this Fellowship is to investigate the international best practices in work-based learning and its application in the Victorian/Australian Vocational Education and Training Programs.

During the initial period of Fellowship, the Fellow was able to develop a network with the international Team at Swiss Federal University of Vocational Education and Training (SFUVET). Through this Network the Fellow visited Switzerland in the first leg of her Fellowship Journey. During her visit to Switzerland, the Fellow had opportunities to have first-hand experience of Swiss VET system by visiting and interacting with various stakeholders like VET schools, VET Teachers, past and current VET learners, VET researchers, Career Guidance office, industries, and the Swiss Skill Fest. During this visit the Fellow was also able to meet with delegates from South Africa, Saudi Arabia and Peru to discuss work-based learning in their respective countries.

During the second leg of Fellowship travel, the Fellow visited Chitralada Technical Institute in Thailand and Nettoor Technical Training Foundation (NTTF) in India. Visits to these institutes aimed to investigate how these training organisations implemented a work-based learning framework for their VET learners.

Through the Fellowship travels and through the networks developed, the Fellow was able to develop concrete understanding of different successful work-based models implemented in the VET system globally.

The research and learnings undertaken during the Fellowship demonstrated that Australia could do much better in providing work-based learning for its VET learners. The international best practices show that well developed work-based learning opportunities are essential for smooth transferring of VET learners to employment. The Fellow also recommends that apprenticeships, traineeships, and other models of work-based learning must be supported and implemented to all VET qualifications. The Fellowship findings also point out the importance of ongoing industry collaborations for successful implementation of work-based learning.

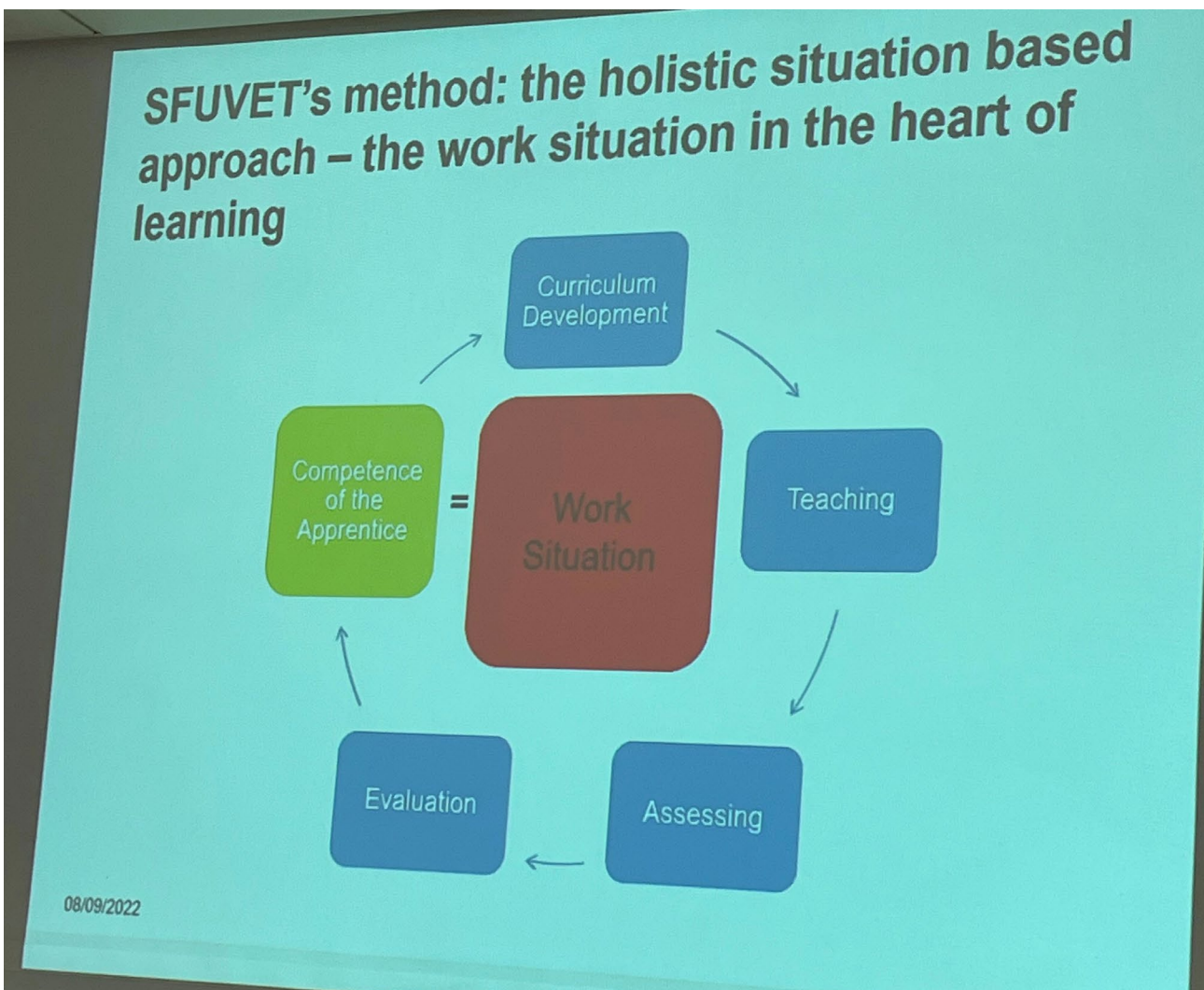


Figure 1. Work based learning

3. Fellowship Background

3.1 Fellowship Methodology

The Methodologies used during the Fellowship research are mainly visiting places and interacting with key people like VET teachers, researchers, learners, and other stakeholders. These methods helped the Fellow to collect qualitative information and to have the first-hand experience of the best practices she researched.

During the time of the Fellowship, Fellow conducted the following activities to gather relevant information.

- Meetings with Academics in the VET sector in Switzerland, Thailand and India to learn about the key elements of the work-based learning in their country/ institutions and the local contexts.
- Visits to Vocation education schools in Switzerland, Thailand, and Bangkok to meet with learners and VET educators to learn about the application of different work-based learning approaches
- Interviews with trainers and curriculum developers from the institutions in Switzerland, Thailand, and India to gain an overview of how work-based learning is integrated into curriculum and classroom learning.
- Visited different stakeholders in the Vocational Education and learning sector in Switzerland including industry associations, companies, training centres and career guidance centres
- Attended seminars to learn the theory of the Swiss VET system
- Visits to various industry and VET programs like Swiss Skill 2022 to get insights into the nature and extension of the Swiss apprenticeships. This also provided the Fellow with opportunities to meet with Swiss VET academics, past and current students, and Industries.
- Meetings with an international Delegation team from South Africa, Saudi Arabia, and Peru to discuss work-based learning approaches in their respective countries.
- Literature review

3.2 Fellow Biography

The Fellow is a Vocational education teacher who has 14 years of experience in Vocational education and Training in Australia. Currently she is facilitating training to students who undertake qualifications in Cert IV and Diploma of Youth Work at RMIT University, Melbourne. As part of Fellow's role as a VET teacher, she is involved in sourcing and providing work-based learning opportunities for her students. As the Fellow is directly involved in the work-based learning context in the VET sector she is aware of the benefits of work-based learning and the challenges in this area for the learners, industry and teachers. Fellow has completed a Master of Social work from

Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, India, Bachelor of Economics from Mahatma Gandhi University, India and Graduate Diploma of adult Education, MW Training, Australia.

3.3 Fellowship Context

10 Australian Vocational education and training is aiming to create a workforce which is ready to engage in the world of work. However, most of our VET learners are trying to enter the workforce without any real-world work experience. Even though in the Victorian VET sector, we loosely talk and implement work-based learning, there isn't however a lot of effort from the VET sector or the government to implement quality work-based learning approaches in our VET system. The Fellow (Ani Tom) believes that a solid work-based learning system in our VET sector will lead to better employment outcomes for the learners and better economic outcomes for the State.

In 2021 4.3 million students were enrolled in Vocational Education and Training in Australia. However, the number of students who were able to undertake work-based learning either in the form of apprenticeship or quality work integrated learning is very limited. The number of apprentices and traineeships provided is less than 0.4 million which means only 10% of the students enrolled in Vocational Education have opportunities to undertake either apprenticeships or traineeships. Out of those apprenticeships, 61.9% is offered to the training areas in the trades. So, there is only very limited apprenticeships opportunities for learners undertaking a non – trade VET qualification, (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2022)

Looking at the employment outcome for VET learners in 2021, young people who completed their VET qualification with the apprenticeships have a very high employment rate of 91.8%, compared to average employment outcomes for learners who completed a VET qualification which is only 60.6%, (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2022). This shows that learners with real work-based learning opportunities like apprenticeships are very likely to end in employment at the end of their VET qualification.

As we talk about work-based learning there are different types of work-based learning such as apprenticeships, traineeships, work integrated learning opportunities, work placements etc. To create any of these opportunities for our learners, the training sector must have close knit relationship with industries. In other words, industries should be convinced about the benefits of providing apprenticeships, traineeships or work integrated learning opportunities for VET learners. Currently, in Victoria, the industries mainly providing apprenticeships are construction and hospitality. Involvement of industries in the other sectors like health and social, commercial, retail, education etc are very limited (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2022). In Fellow's own experience as VET educator, application of quality work-based learning strategies is very poor in vocational education courses in health and social care sectors in Victoria.

Through undertaking this Fellowship, the Fellow is bringing to attention the importance of work-based approach in our vocational education system and the best practices globally in the area of work-based learning. Through the initial research during the Fellowship period, the Fellow came across the Vocational Education and Training in Switzerland which is focused on work-based learning. Further research into the Swiss system showed that Swiss VET system which has also known as the Dual Track approach, (which involves learning in the classroom and at workplace), enables young people to enter the labour market with relevant work skills. The Swiss VET system also has very strong connections with the industry and is also labour market focused. These factors directly contributed to the low youth unemployment rate in Switzerland, which is 0.9% in March 2023 (Economics, 2023)

Switzerland has a well-developed apprenticeship-based VET system which is recognised as the core of their economic development, (Huter, 2022). As the Swiss industries are well aware of the value of the vocational education for their own growth and development and the overall economic growth, their involvement in VET is very high. In Switzerland, small, medium, and large-scale industries equally share the load and benefit of providing apprenticeships for VET learners and every learner engaged in the Vocational Education has the opportunity to undertake apprenticeships as part of their VET qualification (Swars, et al., 2016). However, in Australia, majority of our industries don't have any role in Vocation education even though most of their workforce is VET qualified.

Unlike in Switzerland where the local jobs/employers have close ties with the VET system, most of our industries don't seem to understand the value of learning in workplaces. Most of the industries and workplaces are seeing this as a burden due to increased workload in terms of supervision etc., lack of resources and lack of understanding of the system (Atkinson, 2016) . Unfortunately, the government also is not providing enough funding or support to encourage industries to actively engage in the vocational education sector.

In Thailand and India, the VET institutes the Fellow visited have very strong ties with industries starting from developing the curriculum, providing industry placements and then directing employment opportunities for the learners once they have completed the course. Both those schools said that their aim is not just to provide a qualification to their learners but to make sure that there are employment outcomes for their learners.

4. Fellowship Learnings

The Fellowship provided excellent opportunities for the Fellow to investigate and learn about the following topics across three different countries.

- International sustainable best practices in work-based learning
- Importance and benefits of Work based learning in Vocational Education system
- Role of industry collaboration in work-based learning
- Role of other stakeholders in developing and implementing work-based learning

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4.1 International sustainable best practices in work-based learning

As part of the Fellowship research, the Fellow visited Vocational education institutes and met with VET experts in three different countries. These visits helped the Fellow to learn about the sustainable work-based learning approaches used in those countries/ institutes.

4.1.1 Case Study 1: Switzerland

During the first leg of fellowship travel the Fellow visited Switzerland to study about the Vocational Education System there. Switzerland has a well-developed work-based learning approach which is focused on apprenticeships and known as Dual VET. All the students enrolled into a VET qualification must undertake an apprenticeship as part of their qualification. So, the work-based learning starts from day one of their vocational education course. Dual VET system involves learning in classrooms, workplaces, and third-party training centres, which is a great example of public – private partnership in VET system. 75% of the young people in Switzerland choose Vocational Education over other options which means Vocational education is not the ‘last option’ for young people, it could be the ‘best option’ to enter workforce and further develop their education and career pathways. Switzerland invested in research and innovation to improve their VET system including training and development for VET trainers and VET professionals which is a key element of the quality of a VET system. According to the data, in Switzerland, 75% of the learners will be offered employment where they have undertaken work-based learning towards the end of their course (Lurvink, 2022).

During her time in Switzerland the Fellow spend most of her time networking with several key players in Swiss VET system. The Fellow visited and participated in several seminars and workshop at Swiss Federal university for Vocational Education and Training (SFUVET). SFUVET is a leading player in different aspects of VET in Switzerland. SFUVET is considered as Switzerland’s expert organisation for Vocational Education and Training. They offer training for VET professionals, conduct VET research, support international collaboration in Vocational Education and Training. SFUVET also plays an important role for all the partners in Swiss VET System- industry, government, professional associations- as a central point of contact for development of research projects and

continuing training for VET professionals. The workshops and seminars at SFUVET provided the Fellow with a deep understanding of the Swiss VET system.

Through SFUVET, The Fellow visited a number of stakeholders of Swiss VET system. The first one was a VET school, IDM VET School in Thun, to see how the VET courses are delivered in classroom settings. During this visit the Fellow was able to hear and see from trainers and students about their teaching and learning experiences. Students need to attend 1-3 days of school based on the VET course they are doing. The rest of the days they will be attending their workplace. Classroom learning is very much practice based. They have machine rooms, labs, kitchens etc. where students can practice their skills. All of the student's works and progression are visible for the teachers and students through the online learning management systems. So, the monitoring of the progression of the student is easy and transparent for all stakeholders.

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The Fellow also visited a Career guidance centre, BIZ Career Guidance Centre in Thun. Career guidance centers are an integral part of the Swiss VET system. They support the students to choose the right career, apply for apprenticeships and VET courses. Career guidance centers also work with the parents to support their young people through this very crucial time of their lives.

Another stakeholder the Fellow was able to visit was an industry training center, Sussetec, in Bern. Industry training centers are places where VET students will get opportunities to learn practical skills which are important for the industry but not offered at their workplaces. Trade associations or industry professional bodies are in charge of industry training centers. Training at the industry centers make the students become masters in their profession.

The Fellow also able to visit an industry placement with COOP Switzerland. COOP is one of the biggest retail chains in Switzerland, who provides a variety of apprenticeships to VET students. This visit helped the Fellow to understand how the industry and VET sector work together to provide the best work-based learning opportunity for the learners.

The Fellow also attended the SWISS Skills Championships 2022. This is a great opportunity for VET students to put their knowledge and skills to the test. There were apprentices from 150 professions presented to showcase their excellence. This also was a great networking event where the Fellow was able to meet with many people like VET teachers, school directors, and past and present VET Students.

The Swiss VET system provide the learner an entry into the world of work and opportunities to further develop their careers.

The Fellow's time in Switzerland provided her with excellent opportunity to learn and experience the theory and practice of Swiss VET system.



Figure 3. AT SFUVET with the international delegates who attended the The Swiss International VET Academy Programme

4.1.2 Case study 2: Thailand

In Thailand VET is offered mainly through private and public VET institutes. VET education is considered as a system to respond to the needs of industry in terms of providing quality labour and also improve employment outcomes for young people. The types of courses offered in VET cover a wide range of disciplines including Industry, Commerce/ Business Administration, Arts, Textile, Home Economics, Information and Communication Technology, Agriculture, Fishery, and Tourism and Hospitality. Most of the VET qualifications in Thailand has some practice-based learning opportunities however, unlike Switzerland, the apprenticeship system is not very common. Recently work based education in VET is getting a lot of attention in Thailand.

In Thailand, the Fellow visited Chitralada



Figure 4. Chitralada TECH

Institute of Technology in Bangkok. Chitralada institute is a public – private venture. They have implemented a well-developed work-based learning system to their framework of vocational education courses. In their framework, in the first two years of study, students undertake classroom learning focused mainly on the theoretical/conceptual study and then undertake a one-year work-based learning with the relevant industries. This is very similar to an apprenticeship where the learners undertake work-based learning and get paid for the work. The institute believes this kind of work-based learning is important for the students to have a clear understanding of the workplace. It also believes that this work-based learning approach provides opportunities to familiarise students with the latest technology etc. before they enter into the work force. Majority of their industry partners are multinational companies. The institute also think that industries are also interested in providing longer periods of work-based learning rather than short term work placements. Industries believe that this long-term work-based learning opportunities will support the learners to familiarise with workplace culture and workplace demands which will benefit both the learner and the industry. They have 100% employment outcomes for their VET learners.

4.1.3 Case study 3: India

In India, Vocational education courses are offered through both public and private providers. Even though the Indian education system recognizes the role of Vocational Education, Indian VET system is not very well developed. However there some excellent Vocational Education Institutions in the private sector. Almost all the VET institutes in the private sector have excellent collaboration with industries and providing work-based learning opportunities for its learners.

In India, the Fellow visited Nettoor Technical Training institute which has been providing vocation education for young people since 1959. This training institute is in the private sector and has around 21 VET institutes under its umbrella. They implemented a different work-based learning approach which provide students two different work-based learning opportunities. In the final year of their course, as part of their work-based learning



Figure 5. At NTTF, Kerala , India with the Principle and Vice principle of the Institute

experience, students need to complete an industry project. It can be the design of a product or a program relevant to their industry area. Then they also need to undertake 60 days of work-based learning in their relevant industry. This involves fulltime engagement in the real workspace and in addition the learners will get paid by the industry to attend these work-based opportunities. NTTF has very strong industry connections across the country, and they are able to place all their students in those industries. NTTF has 100% employment outcomes for their VET learners either through their work-based learning opportunities or through their employment support programs. As many of their students undertake work-based learning in multinational companies, many of the NTTF graduates easily get employed overseas as well. During my visit to NTTF, I was fortunate enough to meet with a group of NTTF alumina and was able to discuss about their work-based learning experience. They all agreed that NTTF's work based learning and teaching strategies prepared them to meet the challenges of workplaces both in India and overseas (most of them were employed overseas, including Australia). The team at NTTF strongly believes that VET education without real world practice opportunities will not prepare the students for the world of work.

4.2 Benefits of work- based learning in the Vocational Education system

The Fellowship helped the Fellow learn different aspects of work-based learning and how it benefits the learners, the industry and economy.

Many countries and emerging economies are looking at work-based learning approaches such as apprenticeships, traineeships etc. as a key strategy to tackle youth unemployment (OECD/ILO, 2017).

All three Vocational education systems the Fellow investigated have well developed working based learning models of their own.

Switzerland recognises their VET system as the core of their economic development. They are focusing on developing a quality workforce through their Vocational education system. The Swiss VET system prepares young people for the real-world work by providing them with real work experiences during their course. Vocational education which aimed to provide young people with this exposure to working life through work-based learning opens a wide range of career prospects for learners through career and study pathways.

According to Chitralada Institute trainers, there is a huge difference in the attitude of learners once they have started their work-based learning as these opportunities give them a taste of the actual workplaces (Suvapataya, 2022). Further to that the VET experts from all the host organisations

agreed that even the excellent classroom learning will not give the learners a good understanding of the actual workplace. Work based learning provides learners with opportunities for the application of their skills and knowledge in a real-life situation.

Workplace learning is also important to develop and practise soft skills like communication, problem solving, critical analysis, and teamwork which are integral to today's workplaces. NTTf recognised that work-based learning made their learners job ready and provided opportunities for an early entry into the job market.

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Work based learning has not only benefited the learners but the industries as well. All the industry stakeholders the Fellow met acknowledged that work-based learning helped to develop a workforce which is suitable for their needs; it means economic benefit and a sustainable workforce for them. According to the Swiss retail giant COOP, the Swiss VET model provides them a work force which is skilled, and their employee retention rates are very high. (Lurvink, 2022)

Good work-based learning opportunities also encourage learners to pursue Higher Education. Academics from the Chitralada institute of Technology noted that, after undertaking industry placements as part of their work-based learning many of their young learners decided to continue to Higher Education ((Suvapataya, 2022). They believe this is because real work experiences provide the learners information about further career opportunities at workplaces. In Switzerland, every student undertaking a VET course has an opportunity to pursue higher education during their VET course itself. They have been provided with opportunities to undertake additional learning which will then provide them opportunities to continue into higher studies from their VET courses.



Figure 2. With the Academics and Teachers at IDM VET School, Thun, Bern

4.3 Role of industry collaboration in work-based learning and curriculum development

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The Fellowship experience was an eye opener for the Fellow to learn about the huge role local industry can play in the Vocational Education Sector. All the three models the Fellow research have well developed relationships with industry. Industry's role is not just providing work-based learning opportunities, but they are key players in developing the Vocational education programs.

Swiss VET system recognises that industry has a big role in Vocational Education and Training. In Switzerland, industry decides what needs to be in the curriculum and provides opportunities for work-based learning for all their VET courses. Evidence from Dual VET system in Switzerland demonstrated that not just the learner but the industry and economy also benefit from a well organised apprenticeship-based VET system. In Switzerland the industry peak body has a significant role in the curriculum development for their relevant courses. Industry has high level of ongoing engagement with VET in reviewing and revising the curriculum. Each industry / profession has its own association or peak bodies. They meet with relevant VET sector regularly and provide feedback on the curriculum and any changes industry would like to see based on the new trends, introduction of new technology etc. Based on the feedback, VET sector changes the curriculum and even introduce new courses to address the needs of the industry. As the industry is directly involved in the Curriculum development of the courses, they trust the system and they know that VET can produce skilled workers. (Felser, 2022). According to Benni Lurvink, head of training and development, Coop, Switzerland, "a good employee is a person who is able to manage the work situation successfully. So, the work situations should be the basis for curriculum, content, and teaching for a VET Course" (Lurvink, 2022). Industry collaboration is the key to develop such a curriculum and teaching strategies.

NTTF in India has tie-ups with 450+ industry groups from all over India, with which help them to provide work – based learning opportunities for around 2500 students every year. NTTF meets with their major industry partners to make curriculum changes based on the needs of the industry. They also meet every six months with the industry to review their teaching and training strategies. Even though these meetings always end up with major curriculum changes, it will contribute to the teaching strategies especially with soft skills. NTTF said this collaborative approach has helped them to keep on top of the changes and emerging needs in the industry. They found this approach is the main driving force in maintaining sustainable relationships with the industry for past 60 years. (Aiyappan, 2023). They also found that this approach helps them to produce skilled workers for their industry partners – the workers who have the skills and knowledge required by the industry. The strong ties with local industries helped NTTF learners to achieve 100% employment outcomes once they have completed their courses.

Chitralada Technical institute has developed industry collaborations with multinational companies in Thailand to provide work-based learning opportunities for their students. Chitralada said they use peak industry bodies and industry associations to develop their collaborations. They have used Thai-German Chamber of Commerce to tap into German based Multinationals to collaborate for work-based opportunities, (Suvapataya, 2022). For their curriculum, all the core subjects for their courses are designed based on the specific industry requirements and needs. They meet with industry regularly to review their courses. Trainers at Chitralada believes that if the learners are not learning the skills industry required, it's very hard for them to be successful at their workplaces.

4.4 Role of other stakeholders in promoting and supporting work-based learning

During the Fellowship study, the Fellow found out that the role of government, is an important stakeholder, is very crucial in developing and maintaining a high-quality Vocational Education system. The Vocational Education system in Switzerland is a mission collaboratively owned by the Ministry of Education, Industries, and learners. Roles and responsibilities of the three key players are very clear and thoroughly followed up using centrally managed monitoring systems. VET in Switzerland is fully funded by the government.

In Switzerland, the role of the career guidance centres is very critical in supporting the young learners to choose the right VET courses and the industry partners to do their work-based learning. Most young learners struggle to choose the right education / career pathways. Career guidance counsellors at the centres work alongside the young people and their parents to provide personalised support throughout the process of identifying their career interests, then selecting and applying for VET courses and apprenticeships. These career guidance centres are government funded and all the young people has easy access to it. Bern province alone has 8 career guidance centres which have 200 staff to support young people in that province. Career guidance centres also play a key role in preparing young people for vocational education. They have many preparation programs such as industry visits, short apprenticeships, individual counselling session etc. They also support the young people who are unable to secure apprenticeships to attend bridging options like VET preparation schools, pre- apprenticeships etc.

All the models the Fellow researched demonstrated that learners have a key role to play in a successful work-based learning model. All these models have compulsory attendance requirements the learners need to adhere to. Learners also are responsible for finding their respective workplaces with the help of the training organisation or other stakeholders like career guidance centres etc. Learners also have responsibility and accountability in terms of completing their tasks on time and keeping very close contact and communication with all the relevant stake holders like industry, VET schools and government.



Swiss VET system also has another stakeholder called industry training centres which provide training to prepare the learners for all the aspects of their chosen profession. This is to fill the gap in the training offered at the VET Schools and the industry.

All three models have strategies to include learner’s families in supporting the young people to navigate their learning journey.

Figure 6. At Sussetec, Industry training Centre, Bern

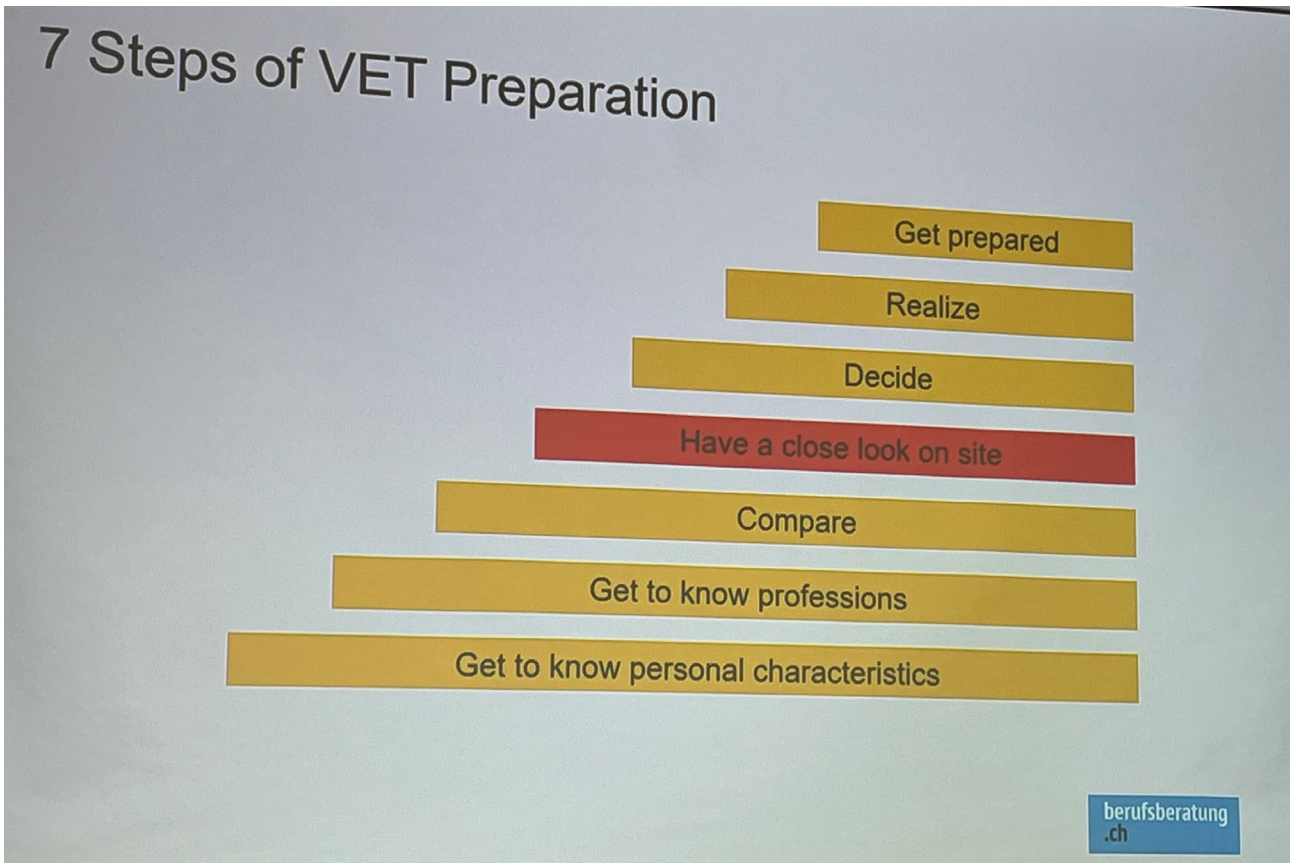


Figure 7. VET Preparation - the Swiss Way

5. Impacts of Fellowship

5.1 Personal Impact

Fellowship opened a wide range of opportunities for networking, learning and application of learning for the Fellow. Fellowship provided opportunities for the fellow to visit places of excellence and meet international experts in her area of study. As a Vocational Education Teacher, it was great to meet with VET professionals from other countries and learn and share experiences. Fellow was able to meet with VET experts from six different countries (four different continents) during her Fellowship journey.

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The whole Fellowship experience helped Fellow to develop better understanding of the Australian Vocational Education System. Even though the Fellow has been working in the VET sector for a long time, her understanding of the sector was very limited. However, while preparing and undertaking the Fellowship, Fellow got many opportunities to undertake further learning of our own system.

It was also great experience in visiting places and encountering with different cultures. Some of those experiences were beyond the Fellow's expectation about the Fellowship travels. The experiences like, visiting a cheese Factory in regional Switzerland and being able to talk to the apprentice working there about their work-based learning experience; visiting Swiss Skills 2020, the Swiss central Vocational Championships which offered inspiring insights into the huge variety of Swiss apprenticeships and also able to watch Switzerland's best young professionals live in action were truly amazing.

Fellow has developed her confidence through the knowledge and learning she was able to acquire through the Fellowship engagements. This experience will also inspired her to undertake such opportunities in the future as well.

The Fellowship travel opened opportunities to learn about different models of vocational education system in different countries which the Fellow is very passionate about. The knowledge gained through the Fellowship improved her expertise in different work-based learning models in Vocational education and Training. The Fellow understands and acknowledges that these learnings are valuable for her current role and for future career opportunities. Fellow was also able to further develop her skills and interest in research and innovation in Vocational Education and training through her Fellowship experiences.

The Fellow is very grateful for the chances to meet, hear, learn, and be inspired by other ISS Fellows and being part of such an illuminating network. The whole Fellowship experience was outstanding. This experience supported the Fellow to grow as a person and as a professional. The travels and the learnings undertaken in the last 10 months will stay for ever and will make significant contributions to the Fellow's future activities.



Figure 8. With the international Delegates at Swiss Skills 2022



Figure 9. At Emmentaler cheese factory



Figure 10. At Swiss Skills 2022

5.2 Professional Impact

Fellow developed extensive professional relationships during the Fellowship which provide her with further opportunities in the sector. Fellow is currently working with Swiss Federal University of VET (SFUVET) to establish a project to undertake further research and learning in the VET Sector. The proposed project is intended to conduct further research and learning into integrating Hybrid Learning strategies into work-based learning to prepare the young with required digital skills to enter into the work force. Another area the proposed project will cover is looking at potential pathways for VET learners in Australia and Switzerland. This project is looking to collaborate with Movetia, which is the Swiss national agency for the promotion of exchanges and mobility in the education system in both national and global avenues. As Switzerland government and its Education Ministry is very keen to establish relationships with Australian Education Sector, if the project is approved by all parties, it will be the first of this kind. The Fellow presented her Fellowship learning to her colleagues through a cluster meeting at RMIT University. Fellowship learning also helped Fellow to improve her practices as a VET trainer who support her learners to undertake work placements. The Fellowship encouraged Fellow to expand her own industry collaborations. Fellow is currently involved in developing industry partnerships at her workplace, RMIT university, to provide better work-based learning opportunities for her students. Currently Fellow is part of a project to develop assessments for the new training packages for RMIT University Youth Work



Figure 11. At NTTF Kerala India



Figure 12. With Marina Gorlimond, Senior advisor, International relations, Swiss Federal University

Program. Fellow is using her Fellowship learnings to integrate work-based learning into curriculum and assessments. The new training package the Fellow is currently working on has mandatory work based (placement) requirements.

5.3 Sectorial Impact

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The Fellowship improved Fellow's capacity for networking and advocacy for better work-based learning opportunities for VET learners in Australia. Fellow is hoping to develop a pilot project in association with Victorian Skills Authority to develop a work-based training within her industry area which is Youth Work / Community Service work. This is very relevant to the priority area 'Developing quality training with deep and meaningful connections to emerging or ongoing industry needs' the Fellow was focusing during her Fellowship application research.

Fellow is currently in conversation with Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) to share her Fellowship findings and develop industry partnerships with youth work organisations to provide better work-based learning opportunities for students doing Youth work courses.

Based on the Fellowship learning, Fellow believes that her learning will play an important role in developing well planned work-based learning opportunities to strengthen the Victorian VET system and generate benefits for our learners, industries, and economy.

Fellow also wants to advocate for apprenticeships for students to undertake their work-based learning in regional Victoria. This will help to reduce the skills shortage in regional Victoria. This apprenticeship opportunities will also attract young people from regional areas to Vocational education.

6. Recommendations and Considerations

Australian Vocational education system provides work-based opportunities for our learners however such opportunities are focused mainly only on Vocational courses in trades and are very limited to other areas like social care, health, commercial etc. Switzerland has apprenticeships for each VET qualification they offer. This is possible through well-established industry collaboration with local industries and industries peak bodies. The Youth unemployment rate in Australia is 7.9% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023) whereas in Switzerland it's only 0.9% (Economics, 2023). Switzerland gave the credit of low unemployment rate to its Vocational Education System. Vocational education is not about having a qualification, but it should be about supporting young people to secure employment in their area of studies. The best strategy to achieve this outcome is to implement work-based learning in all our VET courses. We need new policies to make changes to the way we conduct our VET courses. It should create a pathway of "VET to employment". Based on the Fellow's research and learning, Fellow suggests the following recommendations.

- 6.1. Bringing the industry on board is the first step of establishing high quality work based Vocational education. It should start with involving industry peak bodies and local industries in developing the curriculum and training packages and even VET courses. Industry consultations for training packages must be conducted with local industries and industries peak bodies. For example, the industry peak body for the VET course the Fellow is teaching (Qualifications in Youth Work) is Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic). As per the Fellow's understanding YACVic has very little role in developing curriculum for Youth work VET courses. Many Youth work organisations in Victoria the Fellow is working with, mentioned that they really appreciate opportunities to have a say in what skills and knowledge their work force needs. We need to develop better strategies to acknowledge the role of industries in VET sector in developing and facilitating VET qualifications. It's also important to have conversations around how industry can contribute to Vocational Education. More consultation with the industry to see what support they need to provide quality work-based learning opportunities for learners.
- 6.2. The roles of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SME) are very important in providing work-based learning opportunities. In Switzerland 85% of the apprenticeships are offered by SMEs (Swars, Seminar , 2022). In Australia, 99% of business are SMEs (OECD, 2023). In the youth work industry, most of the organisations are small scale, non-profit, are not consulted or included in the any conversations around training packages or required industry skills for VET courses etc. This applies to SMEs in most of the industry areas. The Fellow believes that work-based learning opportunities in SMEs is an untapped area for most of the industries. The government should take more care in involving these industries in conversations around Vocational Education as most the employees in the SMEs are VET educated. Work based opportunities in SMEs will be a game changer for industries and

VET in developing sustainable work-based learning opportunities. These opportunities will easily turn into employment outcomes for learners. By collaborating with the VET sector SMEs can develop their own workforce which will be skilled and easy to retain. This also will save SMEs time and money spending on hiring and training employees.

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- 6.3. It's important to educate the industry about the benefits of supporting VET learners through opportunities for work-based learning. Industries should be educated on the benefits such as financial benefits, development of a sustainable and efficient work force etc. using the successful case studies locally and internationally. In Australia it's very challenging to engaging industries and employers into education (Atkinson, 2016). Government should take initiative to organise seminars, conferences etc. where local industries, VET trainers and VET experts can have open discussions and dialogues. We should invite industries from Switzerland / Thailand /India to share their experience in collaborating with VET and how it supported them to develop a sustainable workforce. In Switzerland, industries invest a lot of money in the vocational education sector in the form of industry training centres, and further training for their employees to provide supervision for learners etc. They are ready to invest because they are convinced of the benefits of investing in the Vocational Education Sector. In Australia/ Victoria it's very hard to find such investments by industry in the Vocation Education Sector especially in the social carer and health sector. Government needs to be more proactive in educating and involving the industry in the Vocation Education Sector.
- 6.4. Even though our training packages clearly talks about the importance of work placements, the government/department do not really provide any further support or follow up to see how this component is implemented. For example, the new CHC training package says, work placement is important to, "Strengthen the individual's experience of the workplace. Support future expectations of performance in the workforce, develop practice skills and application of knowledge within the workplace, promoting stronger embedding of learning, provide exposure to real workplace situations and circumstances which cannot be replicated in a learning environment or simulation.", (Skills IQ, 2022). Furthermore, it says, "Work placements should always involve the appropriate supervision and guidance from individuals in the workplace and trainers and assessors from the RTO. In sourcing an appropriate workplace, attention should also be paid to the availability of opportunities for the learner to observe, develop and practise required skills, and the availability of appropriately qualified workplace supervisors.", (Skills IQ, 2022). Even though this was the requirement in the training package, in the current context it's very hard to get industry to provide appropriate supervision for placement due to lack of staffing and financial issues. Based on the Fellow's experience, (who is teaching a qualification which has mandatory placement requirements), the work placement component is compromised in many courses especially in the CHC training packages. This is where apprenticeships and traineeships are relevant. The Fellow

recommends that the students, who are doing VET courses with mandatory work placement requirements, should have opportunities to undertake apprenticeships or traineeship to complete the work placement component of their qualification. This will provide the students with better learning experiences and increased chances for employment.

- 6.5. A high-quality work-based learning is not possible without the ongoing support to the learners. All the places' the Fellows visited, showed that their learners have excellent support and follow up from the stakeholders like the VET providers, government, and industries throughout and even after they completed their qualification. Here in Victoria, we spend a lot of money and effort on providing Free TAFE. This model is great in terms of providing access to education however the learners are hardly supported in this model. We are not doing much to follow up the journey of the learner. Many VET courses lack attendance requirements, therefore many of the learners do not come to classes. There are no work-based learning opportunities for many of our VET courses, thus the majority of our VET learners don't have any real-world experience. The Fellow believes that the money and effort we spent on Free TAFE should be spent on quality work-based learning which creates better employment outcomes for the learners. Instead of providing unlimited free training opportunities, we should create apprenticeships where there are real skill shortages. This needs to be done in collaboration with the industry for successful outcome.
- 6.6. The Fellow also believes that there is no 'real owner' of our VET system, and it should be owned collaboratively by the industry, government, and learners. The government should take initiatives to develop this collaboration and come up with better strategies to monitor this collaboration. There should be systems and policies in place to outline the role and responsibility of each key stakeholder. The Fellow acknowledges that, we have policies and systems in place however our current monitoring systems are not enough to catch the engagement and learning progression of our learners. We are more focused on the macro data which provides only an overview. This system also makes the key stakeholders like RTOs and learners less accountable. In Switzerland they have developed systems where all the key stakeholders can view the journey of a VET learner and how other stakeholders are contributing to that journey. It makes everyone more accountable and also able to take ownership of their own actions/role.
- 6.7. The Fellow suggests that more funding for research and innovation in the VET sector is key to the ongoing development of best practice models. The Fellow believes that our investment in research and innovation for VET is insufficient compared to Higher Education. The Swiss have made huge investments in research and innovation for VET. They have universities focused on research and training in VET. The Fellow recommends for further funding for research and innovation to develop and promote a high-quality VET system here in Australia

especially into areas like overcoming challenges to engaging with employers, developing sustainable work-based models suitable to our context etc.

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- 6.8. Fellow recommends that the way we promote our VET system needs to be changed. In Switzerland, they promote VET as the core of their economy and 75% of the young people who completed school education opt for VET. Educators at NTTF, India, said that they promote VET and work-based learning as a great opportunity for young people to enter the labour market. However, in Australia we consider VET as an alternative - an education pathway for those who didn't get into Higher Education or a pathway for the so-called low achievers. We should promote the benefits of VET and we should get the industry on board in promoting VET.
- 6.9. The Fellow would like to run a pilot project in collaboration with the Victorian Skills Authority in her area of industry which is Youth Work to see how we can successfully implement a work-based learning model (replicating the Swiss Model) which has high industry collaboration and higher employment outcomes. According to the 2022 Skills Priority List, Key Findings Report, Youth work is assessed as an occupation being in shortage, (National Skills commission, 2022). The Fellow believes well planned work-based learning will help to reduce the skill shortage for Youth work Industry as well as the other 128 occupations in the list.
- 6.10. Fellow also believes apprenticeships and other supported work-based learning opportunities focusing on the regional areas will be the solution for skill shortage in the regional areas. It will encourage the suburban learners to undertake work-based learning opportunities in regional areas and will encourage participation in education for regional cohort. It will benefit regional industry in terms of filling the skills shortage and developing a work force suitable to their needs. Fellow also seeking support from the Victorian Skills Authority to do a pilot project focusing apprenticeships for regional Victoria especially in Health and Social Care industry.

7. Conclusion

Vocation education is aiming to provide students skills and knowledge to excel in their career pathways. Students who do not have necessary understanding of application of their skills and knowledge in their work roles will quickly find themselves struggling in their positions. Employers may also get frustrated when they have to train new employees in what they are supposed to do in their job roles. The Fellow's conversation with many employers in the Youth Work sector in Victoria found that, sometimes skill shortages are there because the employers are unable to find employees with real world experiences. As a trainer, many of the Fellow's students' complaint that they are not even getting interviews for jobs because they don't have any or very little experience to add to their resume. Work based learning is the answer for all the issues listed above. Work based learning improves employability by providing opportunities for the learners to practise their theoretical understanding in real world work scenarios. In Australia we have a great Vocational Education system; we have many SMEs looking for skilled labours, what we need is better collaboration between both sectors. Expanding the collaboration between the VET sector and industries will lead the way for implementing work-based learning strategies for each of the VET courses. This will help us to create excellent learning and employment opportunities for our learners, a sustainable work force for our industries and a better economy for the State.

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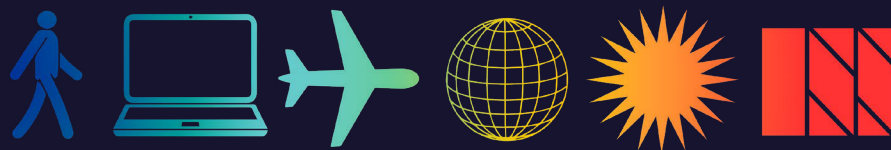
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