

**COMMITTEE OF CHAIRS OF ACADEMIC BOARDS/SENATES
OF UNIVERSITIES IN NSW AND THE ACT**

MEETING (06/2)

15 JUNE 2006

Item 7 Changing the Category B Status of HSC VET Courses

The Committee of Chairs is asked to consider its response/advice in relation to the attached letter dated 24 March 2006 from the Minister for Education and Training to the Chair of the NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee.

By way of background, the following arguments were provided by the General Manager, State Training Services, NSW Department of Education and Training, to the NSWVCC supporting the reconsideration of the Category B status of VET in Schools courses:

- All Board developed courses have the same status and are developed using the same standards and processes. This should mean that the Industry Curriculum Framework (ICF) courses and Industrial Technology are treated in the same way as other courses.
- Some courses such as Design and Technology, and Community and Family Studies are not more "rigorous" than many ICF VET courses, but nevertheless they are Category A.
- It is acknowledged that the average and range of "ability level" of candidates differs between courses. Universities deal with this through the iterative scaling process which establishes relativities between results in different courses based on performance in all courses. Universities consider this a valid process so why is categorisation needed as well.
- Scaled results for ICF students since 2001 have been similar to a range of other courses which are not Category B and better than some (George Cooney's research).
- Significant numbers of ICF students have received offers of university places (George Cooney's research and Bert Evans review).
- ICF courses can be very good preparation for specific university studies as they provide essential practical and vocational skills needed by professionals. For example, the Construction ICF course is good preparation for Architecture, Building and Civil Engineering; the Metal and Engineering course for Engineering; the Primary Industries course for Agriculture. Given that university graduates frequently follow their degrees with TAFE study to gain the vocational applications to complement their predominantly theoretical university study, recognising students' vocational achievements prior to embarking on the theoretical should be encouraged.
- ICF courses also enable the development of sound general skills such as self-reliance, teamwork, workplace competence and responsibility. These attributes are often quoted as being desirable in students entering university.

- Removing categorisation is unlikely to have a significant effect on the profile of university entrants, but it should lessen the current stigma attached to VET and give students broader choice when choosing the best combination of HSC subjects. Currently, many very able students shy away from VET courses. This is apparently due to the perception that universities have a negative scaling policy in regard to these courses. As a consequence, some students do not even take the 2 units which are eligible for UAI inclusion.

Also attached is an extract of the *Summary and Recommendations* from the relevant report, *Strategic Evaluation of Vocational Education and Training in Schools in New South Wales*.

See also <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/reviews/vet/stratevalnsw.pdf> and <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/reviews/vet/melunivetreport.pdf>