

STUDENT TRANSITION TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FROM MIDDLE SECONDARY SCHOOL IN AUSTRALIA AND LEBANON: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

BAREND VLAARDINGERBROEK
NEIL TAYLOR
TOM HAIG

Abstract – *This paper arises from an exploratory comparative study of student transition to vocational education (voced) from middle secondary school in Australia and Lebanon. Following an elucidation of the educational contexts in which this transfer may occur, data arising from surveys of first-year voced students who made this transition are presented and discussed. Converging themes were the link between vocational education and the acquisition of employment-related skills, and the perceived inadequacy of mainstream secondary schooling to meet these students' needs. Issues which brought about a divergence between the two groups highlight major differences between the two education systems. The paper ends with a series of recommendations for the beleaguered Lebanese voced system.*

Introduction

Despite the virtual dismissal of vocational education (voced) as an alternative to regular schooling a quarter century ago (Benavot, 1983), there has since been a resurgent reappraisal of voced alternatives at high school level, particularly with regard to employment outcomes. Channelling secondary school students into vocational streams reduces the risk of later unemployment as it enables them to enter the labour market as skilled workers (Arum & Shavit, 1995). This is an especially pertinent observation in the context of 'at risk' youths who would otherwise likely drop out of school and be facing chronic unemployment (Bishop, 1995, p. 14). Even in the educationally sophisticated western developmental context, it has been suggested that pupils be introduced to vocational subjects as early as primary school with a view to allowing them to opt for vocational tracks at secondary school level (Danish Ministry of Education, 2004).

Voced as an alternative to regular schooling is an established aspect of the Australian and Lebanese education systems, both of which allow students to make the transition from middle secondary school. The backdrop education systems are, however, strikingly different. The two countries share no colonial or educational-

developmental common history, but do face similar issues with regard to such global issues as youth unemployment and the demise of the unskilled labour market, to which they have responded in their own ways.

This paper begins with an elucidation of the Australian and Lebanese voced systems, particularly as they operate at upper secondary-equivalent level. We then present data arising from a comparative study of first-year voced students who made the transition from middle secondary school with emphases on why they chose to transfer, their aspirations and goals, and their overall perceptions of the voced experience. The research will hopefully contribute toward a strengthening of the viable but somewhat embattled Lebanese voced system (World Bank, 2002, 2003; Karam, 2006; European Training Foundation [ETF], 2007; Vlaardingerbroek & El-Masri, 2008).

The Australian and Lebanese voced systems

Australian schooling is based on the British model and features a discernible juncture between lower and upper secondary tiers, although in most states these occur within composite high schools. There is generally a formal assessment event at the conclusion of Year 10, which usually coincides with the end of compulsory schooling in Australia, and which in some states may involve external examinations. Upper secondary schooling takes up the remaining two years of the cycle. Lower secondary curricula tend to be broad, involving both core academic subjects (English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies) as well as Physical Education, Technology and Arts. Within these last two broad groupings elective subjects such as Music, Drama or Dance, Home Economics or Workshop Technology may be undertaken with the latter two areas having a vocational orientation to them.

The upper secondary school experience in Australia may be entirely school-based or may include dual enrolment at school and at a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institute or other Registered Training Organisation (RTO). Under the 'VET [Vocational Education and Training] in Schools' programme, VET courses may be delivered in schools by TAFE staff. There is also the possibility of full-time enrolment at a TAFE at the age of 15 or 16 depending on the state. By a variety of pathways including structured work placements in industry, apprenticeships and traineeships (which enable students to combine training with paid work), students are able to complete their secondary education, acquire valuable job skills and gain a nationally recognised voced qualification. VET is particularly important for young people who do not proceed on the conventional academic path of 12 years of conventional schooling followed by university (Karmel, 2007).

VET qualifications under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) include Certificate levels I and II which provide students with basic vocational skills and knowledge, while Certificates levels III and IV have largely replaced the range of traditional trade certificates and prepare people for a diverse range of jobs from plumbers to animal attendants to graphic designers. Diplomas, Advanced Diplomas, Vocational Graduate Diplomas and Vocational Graduate Certificates also fall within the current accreditation framework of the Australian VET sector. The successful completion of a qualification at Certificate level III is generally regarded as the equivalent of completing Year 12 studies (Karmel, 2004).

Since VET provides skills and qualifications for various types of employment in Australia, except for those jobs which require a university degree, it is a popular choice for young people about half of whom undertake VET within a year or two of leaving school; the participation rate in TAFE for the 15-19 age group is currently 31% (National Centre for Vocational Education Research [NCVER], 2007). There is moreover a significant skills shortage in Australia, particularly in the light of the current mining boom, and people with required skills can command high salaries. The government is addressing this shortage by increasing its budgetary allocation to VET as well as through increasing the quota for skilled immigrants.

There is considerable student traffic between the Australian 'academic' and 'vocational' sectors: TAFE students can articulate into some university courses, while conversely some university graduates undertake VET to obtain specific skills to improve their employability (Keating, 2006; NCVER, 2007). In this sense, VET in Australia is gradually losing its 'second rate' status in the wider community.

Careers education and guidance are common and growing features of the Australian school system. Lower secondary students are encouraged to think about their careers, set personal and career-oriented goals and understand how subject and career choices are linked. There are 'Careers Expos' which students and their parents may attend. Common from Year 10 onward are 'work experience' schemes in the course of the normal school year. Most high school students have access to trained careers counsellors while increasingly parents and significant others are encouraged to visit the school with the student for regular meetings with key advisors (counsellors and teachers) to discuss career and subject choices.

In Australia, the principal reason for offering a vocational alternative at secondary level relates to the problem of early school leaving, which in the context of the declining job prospects for unskilled youth since the 1980s has been associated with high levels of long-term unemployment and social exclusion. As many students feel ill-suited for, and disinterested in, pursuing an academic route to Year 12, policy makers have decided that the best 'social insurance' policy for such students is to provide them with a learning pathway at the post-compulsory levels that will increase young people's retention and employability.

The French-derived Lebanese school system follows a 6:3:3 cycle with an external examination filter (the *Brevet* examinations) controlling progression to the final three years. This examination hurdle coincides with the minimum school-leaving age of 15, although this statutory requirement is seldom enforced. Lower secondary (referred to as ‘Intermediate’ in Lebanon) and upper secondary schooling are institutionally distinct in the public education system.

Lower secondary schooling (Years 7-9) in the Lebanese system is rigorously academic – there are no prevocational subjects in the curriculum, while Physical Education and Art/Music classes are conducted but not formally assessed. Students enter for the *Brevet* examinations at the conclusion of Year 9 in nine subjects – Arabic, Mathematics, English or French as a second language, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Geography, History and Civics. Candidates who fail the *Brevet* (25-35%, varying from year to year) have the options of repeating Year 9, transferring to voked, or simply dropping out of the formal education system. Academically weak students who narrowly pass the *Brevet* are also likely to be advised to transfer out as they stand little chance of succeeding in the demanding Lebanese academic *Baccalauréat* examinations at the end of Year 12. Mainstream academic *Baccalauréat* programmes involve students enrolling in a package of related courses constituting a ‘track’ (Sciences, Life Science, Humanities, or Economics and Sociology) culminating in up to 11 examinations. While some subjects are common to all tracks (e.g., Arabic and English or French as a second language), the content of these courses varies according to the track.

The mainstream Lebanese voked system is situated in Technical Institutes, voked outgrowths of high schools, and accredited private training providers. The system is a centralised one with curricula and assessment being under the auspices of the voked section of the Ministry of Education. There are three branching-off points to voked in the course of the school cycle. Some special needs students are removed from the mainstream school system after Year 5 and enrolled in the 2-year *Certificat d’Aptitude Professionnelle* (CAP). This prevocational programme is almost extinct in urban areas but continues to operate in some rural areas and graduates several hundred students annually. The next is the *Brevet Professionnel* (BP), a 2-year programme which may be entered either after Year 7 or following completion of the CAP. The BP is a low-profile qualification (circa 3000 graduates in 2007). It is strongly occupationally-oriented and offers ‘majors’ in traditional trades (e.g., electrical and motor trades), commercial practice (e.g., bookkeeping, sales) and paraprofessional fields (e.g., beauty therapy, nurse-aiding). Students who have completed the BP or Year 9 of regular schooling may transfer to a 3-year *Baccalauréat Technique* (BT) programme. The overwhelming majority of BT students did so from Year 9 of regular schooling. BT ‘majors’ include mechanical and electrical engineering, aircraft maintenance, heating and air conditioning,

electronics, dental laboratory technician, surveying, interior design, accounting and informatics, tourism and hotel management, and education (preschool, special needs and primary teaching). CAP, BP and BT programmes, although largely taken up by specific vocational training, also include courses in academic subjects, although these are much shorter and less demanding than their regular school equivalents.

The ratio of academic *Baccalauréat* to BT graduates in 2006 was circa 10:3 (from figures supplied by the Ministry of Education). Compared with 'academic' Year 12 graduates, job prospects for BT graduates are reputedly comparatively good, especially in technical fields (Vlaardingerbroek et al., 2007; Vlaardingerbroek & El-Masri, 2008). However, Lebanon has been going through tough economic times over the past few years, and unemployment is high.

Post-secondary voced qualifications are the *Technicien Supérieure* (TS) and *Licence Technique* (LT), the latter being at the level of a first degree in the French university system. It is theoretically possible for a BT graduate to enter university providing the BT 'major' links up with a degree programme (e.g., accounting or engineering); this is, however, extremely rare in practice.

There is effectively no careers education or guidance in the Lebanese education system. School students tend to present a very limited awareness of career options beyond conventional professions (Vlaardingerbroek et al., 2007; Vlaardingerbroek & El-Masri, 2008). Repetition and attrition rates during the first year of voced are high, often because of an inappropriate selection of 'major'. Despite the links with employment, prevailing attitudes toward voced in Lebanon tend to be rather negative, as they are throughout the Arab world (Al-Heeti & Brock, 1997; World Bank, 2002, 2003, 2008; Karam, 2006).

Strategic educational planning is poorly developed in Lebanon, as in the MENA region as a whole (ETF, 2007; World Bank, 2008). A contributing factor in the case of Lebanon is the marked private/public education sector dichotomy with the large former sector strongly oriented toward academic prowess, and often forging links with foreign higher education options (e.g., North American). 'Public' in Lebanon is a disparaging term and the vocational sector is mostly 'public' (Vlaardingerbroek & El-Masri, 2008).

The student surveys

An earlier study (Vlaardingerbroek & El-Masri, 2008) had generated a data pool for 340 BT1 (i.e., first-year BT) students who had completed questionnaires soliciting information regarding their school backgrounds, reasons for transferring to voced, intentions upon completing the BT, career aspirations, and overall perceptions of voced in Lebanon. The following year (bearing in mind the

different northern and southern hemisphere academic years), a questionnaire targeting the same issues was administered to a sample of first-year students at the New England Institute of TAFE in New South Wales, the most populous of the eight states and territories in Australia (see Appendix A). Criteria for inclusion were that students were of upper secondary age (16-19), had transited to TAFE from middle secondary school (i.e., had not completed Year 12), and were enrolled in programmes leading to recognised qualifications (cf. ‘short coursers’). Regular high school students who were dually enrolled at TAFE for one or two subjects were not included. The survey instrument was identical to that administered in Lebanon with the exception of the language used (English instead of Arabic) and some minor modifications for the Australian context. In both Australia and Lebanon, the questionnaire was administered by the staff of the college and the completed questionnaires were returned to the researchers for analysis.

The stringent application of the aforementioned criteria yielded an ensuing Australian sample of 47 – the exclusion of dually enrolled students in particular had a marked effect on sample size. The resultant sample was somewhat biased in favour of trade programmes (plumbing, auto engineering/motor mechanics, carpentry, welding, construction, catering – 32 students); other areas represented were business and financial studies, veterinary nursing and media. Australian lower-level voked tends to be dominated by males in technical and trade areas (Collins, Kenway & MacLeod, 2000; Creswell, Rowe & Withers, 2002) and there were only nine female students in the sample. Sixteen students were of age 16, thirteen were of age 17, nine were aged 18 and nine were aged 19.

A comparative Lebanese sample was compiled by matching each Australian student with a Lebanese counterpart with respect to gender, age, and the programme enrolled in. Where there was no direct equivalent, a similar programme was used (e.g., nursery care for veterinary nursing; heating and air conditioning maintenance for welding).

The data were processed by tallying the responses to the closed items and by transcribing and thematically analysing the free response items. Numerous exemplars of the latter are presented in the findings section.

Findings and discussion

Table 1 summarises the comparative data for the two samples. Two-thirds (66%) of the Australian students had attained the Year 10 School Certificate in five or more subjects, while about the same proportion (72%) of the Lebanese students had attained the *Brevet*. Only six students in the combined sample had undertaken an extra year at school before transferring to voked.

TABLE 1: Summary data for matched student samples (n=47)

	Australia	Lebanon
Attained School Certificate/ <i>Brevet</i>	31 (66%)	34 (72%)
Completed Year 11/Year 10	4 (9%)	2 (4%)
Reason given for transferring to voced:		
(Apprenticeship/traineeship)	19 (40%)	n.a.
Career-oriented	16 (34%)	20 (43%)
Interest in the field of study	8 (17%)	16 (34%)
Other reasons	2 (4%)	4 (9%)
No comment	2 (4%)	1 (2%)
Failed at school	0	6 (13%)
Intention upon completing current studies:		
(Apprenticeships/traineeships)	19 (40%)	n.a.
Enrol for higher qualification	14 (30%)	40 (85%)
Get a job	13 (28%)	6 (13%)
Undecided	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Ultimate career goal:		
Secure good employment	21 (45%)	24 (51%)
Own business/self-employment	13 (28%)	19 (40%)
Other or no comment	13 (28%)	4 (9%)
Perception of voced:		
Positive	33 (70%)	3 (6%)
Ambivalent	7 (15%)	1 (2%)
Critical	3 (6%)	23 (49%)
No comment	4 (9%)	20 (43%)

Forty percent of the Australian students were on apprenticeships or traineeships and were attending TAFE as part of those programmes¹. Of the remainder, the most common reasons given for transferring to voced (34% of respondents) were explicitly career/employment-oriented. A sample of Australian comments:

I wish to pursue a career in carpentry. Can't learn it at school. (male, 16, carpentry)

So I can get a good paying job. (female, 16, business)

To gain skills and knowledge for employment. (male, 17, business)

I feel that it would be better for me to attend TAFE and work toward achieving my goal of becoming a chef instead of staying at school for two years. (female, 18, hospitality)

I want to gain skills and experience so that I can get an apprenticeship with a builder. (male, 18, construction)

Likewise, the most common theme arising in Lebanese students' response to this item (43% of respondents) was the desire to develop employable career-related skills. A sample of Lebanese comments²:

Because the career I chose is found only in voked. (male, 17, engineering)

There are more job opportunities for voked graduates than for academic graduates. (male, 16, electronics)

To enter the job market quickly and be acquainted with its demands. (female, 18, business)

It is an easier and quicker way to choose the career I want. (female, 19, informatics)

Voked is better than the academic system because it enables us to start work sooner. (male, 16, engineering)

The next most common reason given for transferring to voked (17% and 34% of Australian and Lebanese students respectively) was an interest in the field of study being undertaken. Some sample comments:

To be able to weld. (Australia, male, 16)

School didn't have the [business administration] subjects I wanted. (Australia, female, 18)

Because I am interested in surveying. (Lebanon, male, 18)

I like bookkeeping. (Lebanon, female, 17)

The only other reason drawing 10% or more of responses in either subsample was that of having failed the *Brevet*, given by 13% of Lebanese students.

Thirty percent of Australian students indicated their intention to continue with a higher programme upon completing their current studies, one of them at university. The proportion of Lebanese students declaring higher studies to be their intention was an overwhelming 85%. Eight entered ‘university’ for this item, although it must be borne in mind that a number of Lebanese private ‘universities’ would better be referred to as further education institutions. A few students in both samples indicated that they expected to continue to study on a part-time basis while engaged in part-time work at the same time. Conversely, only 13% of Lebanese students (cf. 28% of Australian students – or 68% of all Australian students if it is assumed that all those on apprenticeships and traineeships enter the work force upon completion of their studies) signalled their desire to enter the labour force upon completion of their current studies. Wages are low in Lebanon (the minimum wage was increased by about 50% to US\$ 500/month in May 2008, but unemployment is high and many people work for less) and there is a strong pecuniary incentive for young Lebanese to attain a tertiary qualification.

About the same proportion of students (45% of Australian and 51% of Lebanese) noted as their ultimate career goal to have a satisfying employment. Most Australian students simply wrote the name of their vocation for this item, while Lebanese students tended to write comments such as ‘Work in my field’ or ‘Get a job with a good salary’. Twenty-eight percent of Australian students and 40% of Lebanese students noted as their ultimate career goal the desire to start a small business or become self-employed through comments such as ‘Open my own business’. It is pertinent to note that much self-employment of tradesmen and other workers with technical skills in Lebanon is in the informal sector.

Australian students appeared to be generally very satisfied with their vocation experience, 70% offering positive comments under the last item. A sample of their comments:

I love coming to TAFE. They have helped me achieve so much. (female, 19, prevocational)

Fun, enjoyable, freedom of speech, freedom overall. A step leading to independent [sic]. (female, 17, business)

Great, good learning environment. (male, 18, motor mechanics)

Treated like an adult! Taught professionally! (male, 17, hospitality)

Cool and good. (male, 16, plumbing)

Good. Gain handy skills and knowledge. The facilities here are great. (male, 16, welding)

Sentiments such as ‘Not too bad’ and ‘It’s all right’ accounted for another 15% of student perceptions. Where comments were critical, they alluded to specific problems students were experiencing with courses.

Almost half the Lebanese students did not respond to this item. Of those who did, the most common sentiment was one of a need to improve the lot of voced in Lebanon with respect to the quality of education, prevailing attitudes toward voced, and job opportunities. Some sample comments:

Take better care of voced and improve social attitudes toward it. (female, 16, nursery)

Voced should have the same status as academic education. (male, 17, engineering)

[There is a need to] support voced in order to improve production in Lebanon. (male, 17, electrical)

We need better technology, more labs, more teaching materials. (female, 18, bookkeeping)

There are too many graduates [in some fields]. Salaries are low. (male, 17, motor mechanics)

A theme which emerged in numerous comments made under the various questionnaire items was that of the inadequacy of conventional schooling to meet the needs and aspirations of the young people who took part in this study. In all, 41 students (mostly Lebanese) made explicit or implicit comparisons between the mainstream school and voced systems. In all but one case where an Australian carpentry student wrote that TAFE was ‘Just like school’, these comments were unfavourable to the ordinary school system. Some of these comments have already been cited in this paper. Other sample comments:

I couldn’t see the point in doing Yr 11 and 12 doing subjects I didn’t need when I could get what I want here doing one subject I like doing. (Australia, female, 16, hospitality)

School did not give me enough benefits, to [sic] much flex time was a waste of time! I’m not attending university. (Australia, male, 17, hospitality)

You learn a lot more at TAFE than school. (Australia, male, 17, carpentry)

I am finding it a lot easier to understand than school, and the teachers and students are nicer. (Australia, female, 17, prevocational)

I want to practise my specialisation and not just study academic disciplines. (Lebanon, female, 18, nursery care)

I tried to continue in secondary school but failed. I want to develop my talent in the drawing field. (Lebanon, male, 16, technical drawing)

I failed Grade 10 and hate memorisation. I like electricity and electronics and practical work. (Lebanon, male, 17, electrical)

My inclination is toward voced [as opposed to academic schooling]. Voked offers me the life/job to which I aspire. (Lebanon, male, 18, motor mechanics)

I failed at school and did not want to repeat [Grade 9]. Voked is easier. (Lebanon, male, 17, avionics)

Conclusion and recommendations

Despite the markedly different education systems at both school and vocational/technical levels forming the backdrops from which the two national samples were drawn, there are clear points of convergence between them. Although all Australian students and almost three-quarters of the Lebanese students could have continued on at school had they been intent on doing so, they chose to transfer to voced rather than attempting to complete conventional upper secondary schooling. In both instances, the overarching consideration was to acquire career-related training – assuming expressions of interest in specific voced fields to signal eventual employment destinations, career-related reasons accounted for 96% and 77% respectively of the reasons given by Australian and Lebanese students for having transferred to voced. This observation should come as no surprise, for the relationship between vocational education and direct employment is a strong one, especially for people from lower socioeconomic classes (Arum & Shavit, 1995; Bishop, 1995; Shaban, Abu-Ghaida, & Al-Naimat, 2001). The higher Australian figure is largely accounted for by the observation that 40% of students were already ‘in work’ in the form of apprenticeship and traineeship schemes. A related point of convergence is the strong association between voced enrolment at this level and the desire to eventually become self-employed or to start a small business. But perhaps the most notable similarity arising from a comparison of the two groups is the dissatisfaction with conventional schooling which transpired through numerous comments. These are clearly not ‘lazy’ or otherwise reticent students, judging by the high levels of interest in pursuing

qualifications and securing employment. Rather, they are industrious and, in many cases, ambitious young people who are simply not cut out for academic schooling, as many boys in particular appear not to be (Trent & Slade, 2001; Lingard et al., 2002).

The Australian system appears to cater for such young people much better than does the Lebanese. The presence of prevocational subjects at school, effective careers guidance, and a respected voked alternative to upper secondary schooling, including the possibility of dual school/TAFE enrolment, not to mention apprenticeship and traineeship schemes, combine to ensure a smooth and purposeful transition to voked and associated career pathways from middle secondary school for those students whose aptitudes and aspirations lie in that direction. It is little wonder, therefore, that Australian first-year TAFE students are generally very happy about the voked experience. These various factors are, however, glaringly absent from the Lebanese system, and this is amply reflected in the views that many BT1 students express.

Reform of the Lebanese voked system has long been mooted (World Bank, 2003, 2008; Karam, 2006; ETF, 2007) but public attitudes and political indifference continue to impede progress. A multifaceted approach to bringing voked in Lebanon into the educational mainstream at secondary school level would require the following:

- The introduction of assessable prevocational subjects at lower/middle secondary level. In the Lebanese curricular context this would include commercial studies as well as subjects such as workshop technology and cuisine. In order to make room for such inclusions in the timetable, some academic subjects could be merged, such as Biology, Chemistry and Physics (into Integrated Science) while History, Geography and Civics could likewise be combined.
- The introduction of a professional careers counselling service for school students and their parents.
- Probably most importantly, the raising of the profile of voked as a viable upper secondary pathway in the public eye. The amalgamation of the currently separate ministerial sub-entities overseeing academic and vocational education at school level would be a step in this direction. Greater coordination between upper secondary schools and the BT sections of Technical Institutes in the form of dual enrolment systems whereby the 'academic' subjects would be taught only by schools would help to bring down the barriers between the

subsectors as well as increasing the efficiency of the system. Conversely, the Technical Institutes could offer some voced courses to dually enrolled school students. Ideally, the rigid ‘track’ system operating at the mainstream upper secondary level could be replaced by, or supplemented with, a more flexible curricular structure whereby students can choose from a variety of stand-alone subjects of both the ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ type toward the attainment of the *Baccalauréat* much as Australian students can to attain the Higher School Certificate (HSC).

Clearly, there is a pressing need for much more research into Lebanese voced at the secondary-equivalent level. The principal limitation of the survey component of this study was the small sample size, and a more in-depth study involving larger numbers and possibly adopting a mixed methods approach would be most informative. Perhaps most importantly, tracer studies need to be carried out to ascertain how effective the education/employment interface operates for Lebanese voced graduates.

Notes

1. A German-modelled apprenticeship/voced system does operate in Lebanon under the auspices of a Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)/Lebanese government joint development project. Students enrolled in this programme may be dually enrolled for Lebanese and German vocational qualifications. As this scheme has not been mainstreamed into the Lebanese voced system, it was not included in the study from which the Lebanese data pool was generated.
2. Excerpts from the Lebanese data appear translated from Arabic into English.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our gratitude to the New England Institute of TAFE for their assistance with this project, in particular the director, Mr Gary Pollock, and his professional assistant, Mr Chris Osborne.

Barend Vlaardingerbroek is an assistant professor of Education at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. His main research interests relate to the human capital formation functions of schooling, particularly at the upper secondary level. Dr Vlaardingerbroek has published 50 papers in refereed journals and is principal editor of 'Secondary School External Examination Systems: Reliability, Robustness and Resilience' (Cambria Press). His e-mail address is: bv00@aub.edu.lb

Neil Taylor holds a PhD from Queensland University of Technology, Australia, and is senior lecturer in Science and Technology Education at the University of New England, Australia. His research interests include science, as well as environmental and vocational education; he has published widely in international journals on these topics. Dr Taylor's e-mail address is: ntaylor6@une.edu.au

Tom Haig is a regional education manager with TAFE, South Australia. He holds an EdD from the University of New England, Australia. Dr Haig's e-mail address is: tomhaig@tafe.sa.edu.au

References

- Al-Heeti, A. G., & Brock, C. (1997) Vocational education and development: key issues, with special reference to the Arab world, *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 17(4), pp. 373-389.
- Arum, R., & Shavit, Y. (1995) Secondary vocational education and the transition from school to work, *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 68(3), pp. 187-204.
- Benavot, A. (1983) The rise and decline of vocational education, *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 56(2), pp. 63-76.
- Bishop, J. H. (1995) *Vocational Education and At-Risk Youth in the United States* (Working Paper 95-19). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University (Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies).
- Collins, C., Kenway, J., & MacLeod, J. (2000) *Factors Influencing the Educational Performance of Males and Females in School and their Initial Destinations after Leaving School*. Canberra: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- Creswell, J., Rowe, K., & Withers, G. (2002) *Boys in School and Society*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Danish Ministry of Education (2004) *Retention in Vocational Education in Denmark: A Best Practice Study*. Copenhagen: Author.
- European Training Foundation (ETF) (2007) *Lebanon Country Plan*. Available online at: <http://www.etf.europa.eu/>

- Karam, G. (2006) Vocational and technical education in Lebanon: strategic issues and challenges, *International Education Journal*, Vol. 7(3), pp. 259-272.
- Karmel, T. (2004) *Young People and Vocational Education and Training in South Australia*. Paper prepared for the Review into the South Australian Certificate of Education, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide, September 2004.
- Karmel, T. (2007) *Vocational Education and Training and Young People: Last but not Least* (Occasional paper). Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.
- Keating, J. (2006) Post-school articulation in Australia: a case of unresolved tensions, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol. 30(1), pp. 59-74.
- Lingard, B., Martino, W., Mills, M., & Bahr, M. (2002) *Addressing the Educational Needs of Boys*. Canberra: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) (2007) *Did you Know? A Guide to Vocational Education and Training in Australia*. Adelaide: Author.
- Shaban, R. A., Abu-Ghaida, D., & Al-Naimat, A-S. (2001) *Poverty Alleviation in Jordan: Lessons for the Future*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Trent, F., & Slade, M. (2001) *Declining Rates of Achievement and Retention – The Perceptions of Adolescent Males*. Canberra: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- Vlaardingerbroek, B., Dallal, K., Rizkallah, G., & Rabah, J. (2007) A tracer study of Lebanese upper secondary school students, *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 27(5), pp. 564-571.
- Vlaardingerbroek, B., & El-Masri, Y. H. (2008) Student transition to upper secondary vocational and technical education (VTE) in Lebanon: from stigma to success, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, Vol. 60(1), pp. 19-33.
- World Bank (2002) *Republic of Lebanon Update (4th Quarter)*. Washington, DC: The World Bank Group (Lebanon Country Office).
- World Bank (2003) *Republic of Lebanon Update (1st Quarter)*. Washington, DC: The World Bank Group (Lebanon Country Office).
- World Bank (2008) *The Road not Travelled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*. Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

APPENDIX A

The Questionnaire (Australian Version)

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FIRST-YEAR TAFE STUDENTS

Question 1:

(a) What is your gender? M F

(b) What is your age? _____ years and _____ months

Question 2:

(a) Did you attain your Grade 10 School Certificate? YES NO

Subjects passed: _____

(b) Did you attend Grade 11 or 12 of regular schooling? What was the outcome? _____

Question 3:

(a) Why are you enrolled at TAFE rather than attending regular schooling?

(b) What qualification are you currently enrolled for? (Please give the full name of the qualification) _____

How long does this take to complete full-time? _____ years

(c) What do you intend to do after finishing this qualification?
(Tick one option and answer the question that follows it)

(i) Advance to a higher qualification. Why?

(ii) Get a job _____

(iii) Work and continue studying part-time _____

What would you enrol in? How long will it take you to finish?

(d) What are your ultimate career aspirations?

Question 4:

What is your overall opinion of TAFE education?
