



Northern College of the Arts And Technology

School profile

- Victoria
- Metropolitan
- Government
- Year 10 to 12
- A Registered Training Organisation (RTO)
- 26 VET courses in seven industry areas in 2015
- 371 students enrolled in 2015

The Northern College of the Arts and Technology (NCAT) is a government co-educational senior college in the northern Melbourne suburb of Preston, Victoria. The college provides specialised education in Visual Arts, Design, Media and Performing Arts and in Trades and Technologies. Catering for Year 10 to 12, it offers the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).

The Northern College of the Arts and Technology has been offering a range of vocational education and training (VET) programs since the late 1980s.

The college has an increasing number of mature age students attracted by the Certificate III and IV courses on offer.

Program background

NCAT is a member of the Northern Melbourne VET cluster of schools. Over 400 students from 41 government, Catholic and Independent schools in the cluster come to the college one day per week to access specialist programs and qualifications. Students from the college also access programs in some of the other schools. The cluster enables the provision of a wide range of VET programs to students at the college and across the region.

The college is an RTO, with VET courses identified and developed in consultation with local industry. Given the high unemployment in the local area, a key aim of the college is to provide students with the skills and credentials employers need.

Program features

Course selection and structure

Courses and qualifications chosen by schools and the structure of VET courses should be informed by an understanding of:

- *the needs of students*
- *how VET supports career and employment pathways*
- *industry workforce needs*
- *school sector or jurisdictional policies*
- *funding priorities targeting VET towards particular industries or occupations.*

At NCAT the VET courses offered are based both on the needs of industry identified at a local and broader level, and on the college's specialisation. Given the rate of unemployment in the area, NCAT aims to provide courses that are relevant to the needs of the students and are seen to lead to viable employment and education options.

The programs at the college fall under two streams: the Arts and Technology. Within the Arts stream, VET courses on offer include Instrument Making and Repair, and Technical Production and Sound (Music Industry). The Technology program has a strong focus on sustainable energy. VET courses offered include Furniture Making, Plumbing, Building and Construction.

Students can enroll in a full-time pre-apprenticeship course as a two year program over Year 11 and 12 or as a one year program for students enrolling in Year 12. Connections with industry, Technical and Further Education (TAFE), and Australian Apprenticeship Support Networks support students to transition into apprenticeship pathways.

The VET courses lead to further education and training pathways and jobs, and provide students with employability skills. Many courses have been introduced or redesigned with the particular skills needs of local industries in mind. There are clear pathways to jobs in these industries.

NCAT updates the VET courses in line with industry needs and does this through contact with employers and regional development organisations. They know

where the skills shortages are and if it is necessary are able to change a course from one industry to another or modify another course.

Facilities and equipment

Access to the right facilities and equipment is critical to the success of VET programs and is necessary to comply with VET delivery and assessment standards. The training package or accredited course materials provide information on what is needed. Identifying required equipment informs decisions about partnerships and accessing external expertise and equipment.

NCAT has established a Trade Centre with specialist equipment that enables it to run the VET courses and develop the specific skills identified by industry and local business to meet current and future needs. Some other schools in the cluster also have these centres, broadening the range of VET courses and training available to students.

Industry advisory bodies and local businesses provide advice on the equipment the college purchases to support the VET programs. This is to ensure equipment will be appropriate for the long term – at least 5 years – and that students develop the skills industry needs. In addition, an industry reference group for technology was established to oversee the initial fit out of the Trade Centre.

Staffing

Access to the right staffing is critical to the success of VET programs and is necessary to comply with VET delivery and assessment standards. The training package or accredited course materials provide information on what is needed.

A part-time VET coordinator liaises with the 41 cluster schools and their VET coordinators, especially regarding student attendance, progress and support.

A full-time employer liaison manager works with industry to identify new industry areas and the relevant VET courses, investigates industry needs, establishes industry involvement in the college, and enables staff to gain valuable experience in local workplaces.

An RTO compliance manager oversees all aspects of compliance with RTO regulation at the broad and micro level.

Working with employers

Collaboration is a key component of the Preparing Secondary Students for Work framework. Involvement from employers and industry is critical when planning for the implementation, delivery and assessment of VET for secondary students. Working with employers or work placement providers to provide access to quality and relevant workplace learning opportunities enables students to develop skills that are better aligned with workplace needs.

Two industry reference groups meet regularly to oversee the Technology and the Arts streams, with members being drawn from industry, the TAFE sector, employers and the Local Learning Employment Network. The reference groups provide advice on qualifications and VET courses holistically to ensure their suitability for the students. They also provide advice about new directions in the industry and the resources and equipment required to deliver the VET courses.



Working closely with industry the college learns where skills shortages lie, and can adjust VET course offerings to take advantage of emerging opportunities. For example, discussion with regional economic development planners identified the caravan industry as a booming sector of the regional economy; consequently, the furniture making courses that NCAT already on offer could be adjusted to be more relevant for this industry.

All VET students are required to undertake a work placement to gain industry experience and learn entry-level and employability skills such as punctuality, Occupational Health and Safety, and communication and cooperation in the workplace.

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Integrating VET

VET needs to be integrated into the fabric of schools and the broader curriculum. This may be through:

- flexible timetabling
- language literacy and numeracy support
- assessment support
- support with other additional matters that students undertaking VET courses might require.

NCAT's pre-apprenticeship and trades course is integrated in the intermediate and/or senior Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and embeds the literacy and numeracy skills required for the student's chosen industry specialisation.

As part of fully integrating VET with the broader curriculum, NCAT has also developed industry-driven one year courses with literacy, numeracy, personal development and work-related skills integrated so that all the course content and skills are geared towards a particular apprenticeship, further education or training pathway.

By giving its teachers and trainers opportunities to experience local industry and workplaces first hand, NCAT aims is to raise awareness of the industries and their workplace needs across the college.

Registered Training Organisation status

All VET is required to be certified by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). Schools have a variety of ways of accessing RTO services:

- becoming an RTO
- the school sector acting as the RTO
- partnering with an RTO (auspice)
- using an external RTO to deliver and assess all of the training onsite or offsite.

Each of these options will suit schools in different situations. Whatever the arrangement adopted, schools and employers need to be confident that the RTO has suitably qualified trainers and assessors and access to the industry-standard equipment required.



The college is an RTO with scope to deliver all the VET courses on offer. As an RTO, the college ensures it effectively tailors the VET courses on offer to meet individual needs of the students while still remaining cost effective.

The RTO compliance manager works with the VET trainers on matters such as induction and training, documentation and record keeping, changes to the RTO standards or to the qualifications, and resources to support literacy and numeracy.

Student support

Vocational learning activities and pre-vocational programs support students to select the right VET course and pursue their chosen pathway to a career, employment or further education and training. Career education and the opportunity to gain work readiness skills help students make informed choices and prepare them for learning in a workplace environment.

All students complete an annual Career Action Plan to develop increased awareness and understanding of further education, training and employment options. The VET coordinator and career pathway team ensures that each student is made aware of the opportunities within VET. This includes advice on how VET courses contribute to the VCAL or to the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and to the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) score.

Communication

Current information from a range of sources helps students, parents, employers and the broader

school community understand VET offerings and the opportunities they provide. Communication enables students and parents to understand the options available and to make informed choices.

As well as the usual career guidance, the college markets the VET courses on offer to ensure students understand the advantages available through undertaking a VET pathway and the differences between VET courses and VCE subjects. At the same time, NCAT educates parents about how VET courses contribute to a student's ATAR score and the value in gaining practical experience and the perspective of industry.

NCAT works closely with employers to ensure students have a sound knowledge of the entry-level skills employers require. For example, with the permission, the college adopted a company's performance assessment covering matters such as supervision, attention to detail, occupational health and safety. In this way NCAT makes its VET courses regionally relevant, and enables the college to influence employer expectations.

NCAT educates parents about how VET courses contribute to a student's ATAR score and the value in gaining practical experience and the perspective of industry.

