



NSW Youth Parliament

Equitable Access to Alternative Educational Pathways Youth Act 2025

Bill Proposed By: Education and TAFE Committee

Contents

Explanatory Note	4
Rationale	5
Reference List	7
Part 1 Preliminary	9
1 Name of Act	9
2 Commencement	9
3 Objects	9
4 Definitions	9
Part 2 Monetary Funding and Infrastructure	10
5 Review of Fee-Free TAFE Initiative	10
6 Vocational Training Assistance Scheme (VTAS) Reform	11
7 Creation of Regional TAFE and Private RTO Study Hubs	11
8 Review of Funding for the Educational Pathways Program within the Department of Education	12
9 The Educational Equity and Implementation Divisions	12
Part 3 - Equitable TAFE Tester Course Access for Stage 5	14
10 Mandatory Provisions of TAFE Tester Courses	14
11 Equitable Enrolment and Selection	14
12 Transportation and Financial Assistance	15
13 Integration with Career Education	15
Part 4 Integration of Technical and Vocational Education and Training into Stage 6 Curriculum	16
14 Adjustments of TVET Course Content and Outcomes	16
15 ICF and BEC Contributions to ATAR and Qualifications	16
16 Review	16
17 Curriculum Delivery and Assessment	16
18 Implementation and Review	17
Part 5 Social Education	17
Division 1 Combating Negative Perceptions of Alternative Pathways	17
19 Increased Education in Secondary Schools	17
Division 2 Addressing Gender Stereotypes within the Education Sector	18
20 Addressing Gender Disparities and Inclusion	18

I certify that this public Bill, which originated in the Youth Legislative Assembly, has finally passed the Youth Legislative Assembly of New South Wales.

Hamani Tanginoa, Youth Parliament Coordinator



NSW Youth Parliament

Equitable Access to Alternative Educational Pathways Youth Act 2025

Act no. 1, 2025

A Bill for

An Act to improve access and development of higher and alternative education pathways for young people, and other purposes.

I have examined this bill and find it to correspond in all respects with the bill as finally passed by the Youth Legislative Assembly.

Lian Sequeira, Youth Governor of the NSW Youth Parliament

Explanatory Note

Summary

The object of this Bill is to outline the reform of accessibility and equity surrounding alternative educational pathways across NSW

This Bill comes at a time where the NSW educational system places substantial emphasis upon a singular pathway to completing the HSC, thus causing a lack of depth in educational accessibility and diversity across the state. It is clear that the educational system needs to evolve both physically and socially, to match the changing landscape of education and wider Australian society.

This Bill aims to reform the use of monetary funding to build accessible and equitable access to alternative educational pathways, while improving the viability and perceptions of alternative educational pathways.

Overall, the Bill will diversify and improve the educational system all across NSW, fostering choice, accessibility, and equity.

Overview of provisions

Part 1 sets out the short title, commencement, objects and definitions of the act.

Part 2 sets out a monetary reform of the funding allocated towards alternative educational pathways such as TAFE. The use of reallocated funds to improve physical facilities and VTAS/TAFE access is justified, and the plans of action is defined.

Part 3 proposes the implementation of TAFE Tester courses in Years 9 and 10 of high schools across the state, in order to greatly boost the accessibility and understanding of the possible TAFE courses which can be taken in higher grades.

Part 4 defines the integration of TAFE and TVET courses into ATAR calculation, in order to make alternative educational pathways a viable option for students wishing to attend university.

Part 5 defines the social educational programs required to neutralise stereotypes within the education industry, specifically surrounding alternative educational pathways and gender stereotypes

Rationale

As the Education and TAFE Committee, we've objectively looked at the education system and recognized an outstanding focus on a singular pathway, which is completing the HSC, receiving an ATAR and having direct entrance to university. The status quo does have its benefits; there is an obvious lack of depth when considering the accessibility of alternative pathways. The need for increasing accessibility and appeal of alternate educational pathways for transitioning out of high school is apparent. This includes the need for funding and improvement of TAFE Campuses, and improvement of social aspects, which includes the perception surrounding TAFE/VET courses in high school to improve educational diversity.

The educational landscape of New South Wales is constantly evolving, so it is imperative that any reconsideration of marginalization of vocational learners in university admissions, and historically, TAFE-based VET courses have remained sidelined in ATAR calculation with only select subjects contributing. There is a justified need for reform that would involve reclassifying senior level TAFE courses to be more equitable with other subjects within the education system. These reforms are necessary to expand equitable university access, improve recognition of practical skills, and, perhaps most importantly, to help address shortages in key industries.

On the social side, there are large calls for reform of VET courses to improve the perception of taking these courses, so that they are more widely known and accepted as a valid form of educational pathway. According to the Australian Education Union, recent reforms in Victoria are helping to dispel the negative perceptions, with experts praising how each pathway is being valued and validated as the best pathway options for individuals (Australian Education Union, 2024).

Furthermore, gender stereotypes often cause individuals to feel restricted in specific career pathways, along with educational opportunities. Gender Discrimination leads to a lack of female representation in many sectors, with statistics showing that women account for only 6.8% of completed apprenticeships or traineeships in non-traditional fields, such as IT, engineering, agriculture, and architecture. Broader retention data from NSW public schools reveals that only 66.3% of students stayed enrolled from Year 10 to Year 12 in 2023, with even lower rates for boys and students from rural or low-SES areas (Women NSW | NSW Government, 2024). These outcomes are exacerbated by inconsistent school-based career guidance many students in disadvantaged schools receive from untrained staff, leading to a lack of awareness or encouragement towards VET options. This, combined with the persistent stigma that conational education is a 'lesser' pathway compared to university, continues to deter students from pursuing TAFE, despite its practical benefits and relevance to Australia's workforce needs.

Various states have already experimented with implementing TAFE taster programs designed for students in years 9-10. Although these currently do not provide students with qualifications, the knowledge learnt within the lessons, as well as external programs such as high school based White Card training courses, equipped students, especially those who have academically struggled, find a sense of career security for courses with current staffing deficiencies such as construction or teaching. The implementation of more widespread taster courses, reflective of the model of successful programs such as the Queensland Trade Taster

program, The NSW YES program and the NSW Start Your Future program, could increase student preparation for the workplace, engagement in relevant courses to them, and increase interest and knowledge in understaffed fields. Additionally, expanding these programs so that every TAFE campus has at least one tester will allow regional students to receive better opportunities in learning about different careers.

When examining the physical side of our goals, funding is a contentious aspect in several areas surrounding the development of TAFE and educational related projects, due to a historical lack of allocated financial resources. Despite this, \$300 million promised investment in 2024 to upgrade 120 campuses across the state, especially focusing on regional areas like Wagga Wagga, Albury, and Goulburn aim to develop both digital and physical infrastructure (Rowley, 2024), thus bolstering the feasibility of this bill's goals. Additionally, a multi-year pay deal was secured with TAFE teachers in February 2025 to improve their working conditions: 10.5% pay increase over several years (starting with 3.5% in 2024-25), alongside superannuation increases and improved job security with over 1700 casual teaching staff transitioned to permanent roles (an \$83.1 million permanency budget outcome NSW24-25) (NSW Government, 2025).

Contrastingly, Fee Free TAFE is a joint initiative between Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments delivering 500 000 Fee-Free TAFE and VET places between 2023 and 2026 aimed at addressing skills shortages within targeted industries. The view from Australia's business community is Free TAFE could be seeing completion rates of around 30 per cent. Official data shows completions are even lower at 13 per cent (Australian Government, 2023). Thus, this 1.5 billion Dollar funding initiative can be redefined to support the reforms proposed in this bill, as Fee Free TAFE can be a large appeal factor for students to follow alternative educational pathways within high school.

Contrastingly, The Vocational Training Assistance Scheme (VTAS), which gives eligible students the ability to apply for \$0.33 per kilometer (after a 120 km round trip) and \$56 per night for accommodation, has not been updated to reflect the current economy (NSW Government, n.d.). This reveals that there are many physical aspects of alternate educational pathways which require reform to match contemporary requirements.

To conclude, our bill has been developed as a response to the growing need for increased accessibility and social awareness of alternative tertiary educational pathways, to improve various physical and social factors surrounding it. Through reexamination of several independent government initiatives to ensure their relevance and effectiveness, this bill will reform societal culture surrounding TAFE/VET courses available to Australian youth.

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The Youth Legislature of New South Wales enacts—

Part 1 Preliminary

1 Name of Act

This Act is the Equitable Access to Alternative Education Youth Act 2025.

2 Commencement

The Act commences 28 days after Assent.

3 Objects

The objects of this Act are to—

- (a) fund the reform of state-wide access to alternative educational pathways to engender equitable access independent of region across public and private schools,
- (b) incorporate TAFE Tester programs for years 9 and 10 in schools across NSW,
- (c) reform the current system surrounding all concerned parties (students, teachers and parents) about alternative educational pathways,
- (d) review government spending and financial inefficiencies in relation to uncompleted Vocational Education and Training courses, subsequently investigating and proposing more practical allocations for these funds,
- (e) ensuring equitable access for all incorporated programs and initiatives outlined in this Act.

4 Definitions

In this Act—

TAFE means the system of technical and further education provided by TAFE NSW under the *Technical and Further Education Commission Act 1990* (NSW).

TVET means Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses undertaken by secondary school students, typically delivered by TAFE NSW or other Registered Training Organisations, and contributing towards the student's Higher School Certificate or Record of School Achievement.

RTO means a Registered Training Organisation, being an organisation registered by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) or a delegated state regulator to provide vocational education and training services.

VTAS means the Vocational Training Accreditation Board established under the *Vocational Education and Training Act 2017* (NSW), responsible for approving and accrediting vocational training courses and apprenticeships in New South Wales.

SBAT means a School Based Apprenticeship or Traineeship, being an apprenticeship or traineeship undertaken by a high school student as part of

their HSC studies, combining paid work, vocational training, and school.

Education Pathways Program means a structured program designed to facilitate a student's progression through different levels or types of education and training, including but not limited to pathways between secondary school, vocational education and training, and higher education. This may include credit transfer arrangements, articulation agreements, and recognition of prior learning.

Gender Stereotypes within the Education Industry means oversimplified or preconceived ideas about the roles, characteristics, or abilities of individuals based on their gender, as they manifest in educational settings, curricula, teaching practices, career guidance, and perceptions of vocational or academic fields of study. This includes, but is not limited to, assumptions about suitability for certain professions or subjects based on gender.

Note— The *Interpretation Act 1987* also contains definitions and other provisions that affect the interpretation of this Bill.

Part 2 Monetary Funding and Infrastructure

5 Review of Fee-Free TAFE Initiative

- (1) Section 109 of the Australian Constitution provides that “when a law of State is inconsistent with a law of the Commonwealth, the latter shall prevail, and the former shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be invalid.
 - (a) as the *Fee-Free TAFE Bill 2024* is a Commonwealth initiative enacted and funded by the Federal Government, the New South Wales Government does not hold the constitutional authority to amend or repeal this legislation.
 - (b) any attempt to do so would be inconsistent with Commonwealth law and therefore constitutionally invalid.
- (2) The reinstated model will introduce strict eligibility criteria for individuals to access fully or partially funded TAFE courses, based on the level of need or strategic priority. Eligibility may include, but is not limited to, the following groups:
 - (a) disability
 - (b) women in non-traditional trade
 - i. determined annually through reports submitted to TAFE NSW in collaboration with Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITAB), Skills Reform, and the NSW Department of Education.
 - (c) emerging industry courses
 - i. determined annually through reports submitted to TAFE NSW in collaboration with Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITAB), Skills Reform, and the NSW Department of Education.

- (d) low socio-economic households
 - (e) single parent households, with a household income under \$150,000
 - (f) non-English speaking backgrounds
- (3) An individual who has received a fully funded course will only be eligible for partial funding in any subsequent enrolment in a TAFE course.
- (4) The aim of this revised funding model is to improve course completion rates while ensuring government resources are allocated efficiently, thereby reducing financial wastage.

6 Vocational Training Assistance Scheme (VTAS) Reform

- (1) Increase the funding allocated to VTAS for eligible apprentices and trainees who are required to travel to attend day or block release training with their RTO.
- (2) Currently, VTAS provides a fuel allowance of 33 cents per litre, applicable only after a 120 km round trip threshold is met. An accommodation allowance of \$56 per night is also available. However, according to the ATO, the fuel rate for liquid fuels (excluding heavy vehicles) from 3 February 2025 to 30 June 2025 is set at 50.8 cents per litre. A 42.48% difference.
- (3) The NSW Government/Service NSW will update the fuel allowance to align with the ATO's latest rate for liquid fuels classified under *"All other business uses (including powering auxiliary equipment of a heavy vehicle)."*

7 Creation of Regional TAFE and Private RTO Study Hubs

- (1) Reinvest the funds generated from the model shift outlined in Section 5, into the establishment of Regional TAFE and Private RTO Study Hubs. These hubs will provide essential facilities and support services for students who are unable to access fully equipped campuses.
- (2) While the size and design of each hub may vary, determined by TAFE NSW and the NSW Department of Education, each study hub must include the following core infrastructure:
- (a) safe study spaces
 - (b) break out areas
 - (c) video conferencing capabilities
 - (d) computer facilities
 - (e) high-speed free internet access
- (3) Staff members must also be available to offer the following services:
- (a) basic writing and research skills
 - (b) managing administrative processes

- (c) pastoral support
 - (d) study advice
 - (e) help accessing student services
- (4) The aim of this initiative is to provide a safe and quiet space for TAFE students and those studying through private RTOs to access essential facilities and in person course support. This will better their ability to understand course content and increase completion rates, particularly in rural and regional communities where access to a fully equipped TAFE campus is limited.

8 Review of Funding for the Educational Pathways Program within the Department of Education

- (1) Currently, the Education Pathways Program, *“an innovative initiative aimed at improving education and career outcomes by connecting NSW public high school students with vocational training and employment opportunities”* is available in only 180 of the 400+ secondary schools across NSW. This limited availability creates an inequity in access, leaving many students without the same opportunities.
- (2) Funding will be increased and prioritised in the budget to ensure all schools have access to the program, along with sufficient Department of Education staff to meet the expanded demand.

9 The Educational Equity and Implementation Divisions

- (1) Two teams shall be established to support the implementation and ongoing development of this Act—
- (a) the Educational Equity and Access Team within the NSW Department of Education; and
 - (b) the Curriculum and Standards Implementation Team within the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)
- (2) The Educational Equity and Access Team at the Department of Education shall be responsible for—
- (a) coordinating the roll-out of TAFE Tester and Vocational Pathway Programs in NSW Schools; and
 - (b) ensuring equitable access for students from low-SES, rural, Indigenous, and neurodivergent background; and
 - (c) collaborating with wellbeing teams and school leaders to identify barriers to participation and purpose solutions; and
 - (d) monitor gender and cultural representation across all course offerings to address systemic bias; and
 - (e) overseeing the development of regional study hubs and digital access strategies; and

- (f) liaising with local communities to ensure place-based program delivery; and
 - (g) conducting ongoing reviews to identify additional TAFE, TVET, and RTO courses that may be added to the pool of offerings available to students; and
 - (h) developing proposals to upscale this Act to include a broader and more diverse range of pathways in response to industry trends and student needs
- (3) The Curriculum and Standards Implementation Team at NESA shall be responsible for—
- (a) ensuring all TAFE Tester and TVET courses meet NESA curriculum and accreditation standards; and
 - (b) developing and aligning VET and academic frameworks for Stage 5 and Stage 6 students, including the design of new syllabuses for additional subjects based on course requirements for the Higher School Certificate (HSC) or the Record of School Achievement (RoSA); and
 - (c) developing professional development guidelines to support teacher understanding of alternative pathways; and
 - (d) determining how each new or existing TVET/TAFE course is scaled for HSC and ATAR purposes; and
 - (e) assisting in the development of scaling frameworks for any new TAFE courses approved by the Department
- (4) The Curriculum and Standards Implementation Team (NESA) and the Educational Equity and Access Team (Department of Education) must jointly conduct a comprehensive review into the current subject scaling and assessment models across academic, vocational, and traditional NESA subjects.
- (a) the review must examine whether existing systems equitably reflect student achievement across all recognised pathways; and
 - (b) the review must involve consultation with educators, students, curriculum experts, industry bodies, and equity advocates; and
 - (c) the review must investigate the impact of current scaling practices on ATAR outcomes for students undertaking VET and NESA-equated subjects, with a focus on ensuring equity and consistency in outcomes; and
 - (d) the review must provide recommendations for a revised scaling mechanism that ensures fairness for students undertaking VET courses or alternative NESA-equated subjects; and
 - (e) the review must evaluate the possibility of application of skill-based and individualised assessment models that reflect practical competencies and learning diversity; and

- (f) the review must ensure that all future VET-aligned assessment models remain eligible for inclusion in ATAR calculations and investigate their potential for accreditation in post-school career pathways and further education frameworks; and
 - (g) the findings must be presented to the NESA Board, Department of Education, the Minister for Education as well as the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education inform future curriculum development and legislative reform
- (5) Both teams shall collaborate to publish a joint annual report on equity outcomes, scaling adjustments, new course offerings, and student engagement trends under this Act, to be tabled before the Minister for Education, Department of Education and NESA as well as publicly accessible.

Part 3 - Equitable TAFE Tester Course Access for Stage 5

10 Mandatory Provisions of TAFE Tester Courses

- (1) All secondary schools in New South Wales must offer TAFE Tester Courses to students aged 15 and above.
- (2) These courses must be delivered in partnership with local TAFE campuses, where feasible.
- (3) The following provisions apply to course design and delivery—
 - (a) courses must reflect a range of industries, including both trades and emerging sectors (e.g. tech, healthcare, creative industries),
 - (b) courses must include the following elements—
 - i. hands-on practical experience,
 - ii. basic industry knowledge and career pathway information,
 - iii. student reflection and evaluation components to support post-course planning.

11 Equitable Enrolment and Selection

- (1) Schools must ensure that all interested students of the ages 15 and above are given the opportunity to enrol in a TAFE Tester Course without academic selection or prerequisite barriers.
- (2) Enrolment processes must be transparent and accessible.
- (3) The following measures must be in place to promote equity—
 - (a) priority access must be given to students from underrepresented groups, including:
 - i. students with disabilities,

ii. students from low-SES backgrounds,

iii. indigenous students,

(b) schools must consult wellbeing staff to support and identify students who may benefit most from early exposure to alternative pathways.

12 Transportation and Financial Assistance

(1) The Educational Equity and Access Team (Department of Education) must provide funding to ensure transport assistance for students who cannot provide adequate transport to attend TAFE Tester Courses.

(a) the Educational Equity and Access Team (Department of Education) will allocate a budget each year.

(b) each year the budget is subjected to change with the demand needed for assistance in transport

(c) students who need transport assistance must submit an application and provide adequate documentation

(2) Additional financial provisions include—

(a) a small bursary or voucher for lunch or transport for students experiencing financial hardship,

(b) reimbursement mechanisms for schools arranging group transport

13 Integration with Career Education

(1) TAFE Tester Courses must be integrated into the school's Stage 5 Career Education Framework

(2) Participating students must receive individual career guidance before and after their course.

(3) Schools must ensure that—

(i) students receive tailored post-course counselling,

(ii) feedback from course providers is shared with students and parents/guardians,

(iii) teachers and careers advisers receive PD on TAFE/VET opportunities to strengthen long-term support for students.

Part 4 Integration of Technical and Vocational Education and Training into Stage 6 Curriculum

14 Adjustments of TVET Course Content and Outcomes

(1) The Curriculum and Standards Implementation Team will maintain and/or adjust course content, outcomes and syllabus where necessary.

(a) the Curriculum and Standards Implementation Team will launch an investigation into various TVET course delivery methods as part of a strategic plan to incrementally roll out state-wide access to TVET courses to the greatest extent possible for Year 11 and 12 students in NSW

15 ICF and BEC Contributions to ATAR and Qualifications

(1) Current Industry Framework Courses (ICF) that contribute to both ATAR and Certificate qualifications for Stage 6 students shall remain in place.

(2) Board Endorsed VET Courses (BEC) shall be assessed and trialled as Industry Framework Courses, commencing within three (3) academic years following assent, and must be adjusted to meet curriculum requirements where needed. The following current BECs that must be trialled as ICFs include but not limited to—

- (a) Aboriginal Languages; and
- (b) Auslan; and
- (c) supply Chain Operations; and
- (d) workplace Skills

16 Review

(1) The NSW Department of Education, NESA, and Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education shall conduct a 'Course Alignment Report' review of the integration of T/ET courses into Stage 6 Curriculum every 5 years following the commencement of this Act.

(a) the Course Alignment Report will suggest alterations to and/or the implementation of courses offered by TAFE and Private RTOs in alignment with workforce needs, trends, and community expectations of course provisions

17 Curriculum Delivery and Assessment

(1) Schools shall ensure that the delivery of TVET courses aligns with the standards and requirements set by NESA and the respective training packages.

(2) Assessment for TVET courses shall include—

- (a) competency-based assessments for VET qualifications, and
- (b) formal examinations for HSC and ATAR purposes, where applicable

(3) Schools shall provide students with information regarding the implications of TVET course selection on HSC unit credit and ATAR eligibility.

18 Implementation and Review

- (1) This integration policy shall be implemented commencing the academic year following the passage of the Act.
- (2) The Department of Education, in collaboration with NESAs, shall conduct a review of the integration of TVET courses into the Stage 6 curriculum every three years to assess effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.

Part 5 Social Education

Division 1 Combating Negative Perceptions of Alternative Pathways

19 Increased Education in Secondary Schools

- (1) All NSW secondary schools will incorporate a new education program to—
 - (a) thoroughly inform students on all possible educational pathways through secondary school, including—
 - i. HSC, and
 - ii. TAFE, and
 - iii. RTOs, and
 - iv. SBAT, and
 - v. gap year traineeship, and
 - vi. traineeships, and
 - vii. post-secondary pathways such as, university bridging programs, mature age entry options, and credit transfer arrangements between TAFE qualifications and higher education institutions
 - viii. apprenticeships, and
 - ix. fee for service (non-subsidised), and
 - x. any future further alternative pathways which are introduced
 - (b) educate students on the benefits and drawbacks of each pathway
 - (c) encourage students to experiment with and research various pathways to determine which they would like to follow
 - (d) ensure that student do not view alternative pathways as less respectable or less valuable than traditional pathways.

- (2) All NSW secondary schools must incorporate systems which adequately and thoroughly inform parents and carers about alternative educational pathways for their children, aiming to—
 - (a) equip parents to assist their child in determining the best educational pathway for them in high school, and
 - (b) break negative perceptions surrounding the choice to undertake alternative educational pathways; and
 - (c) provide targeted information sessions for parents from culturally diverse backgrounds, delivered in community languages where feasible, to address cultural barriers that may influence pathway choices; and
 - (d) establish parent/peer support networks to share experiences and outcomes from students who have completed alternative pathways
- (3) All NSW secondary schools must properly equip teachers through training to administer the education programs concerning alternative pathways

Division 2 Addressing Gender Stereotypes within the Education Sector

20 Addressing Gender Disparities and Inclusion

- (1) Schools must work to mandate gender-neutral career guidance to avoid students being steered towards stereotypical fields
 - (a) further training for career counsellors to reduce gender bias and raise awareness into traditionally stereotypical fields and courses.
 - (b) secondary schools and TAFE institutions must implement career exploration which showcase non-traditional career pathways for all genders; and
 - (c) secondary schools and TAFE institutions must establish a mandatory annual report on gender representation outcomes, including employment rates and career progression of graduates to measure long-term effectiveness of stereotype reduction methods.
- (2) Secondary schools shall offer scholarships and bursaries for TAFE courses that are experiencing gender disparity
 - (a) incentives are to be funded by the NSW Government; and
 - (b) prioritise funding allocation based on measurable gender disparity data, with courses demonstrating greatest imbalance receiving enhanced support; and
 - (c) scholarships and bursaries must also include mentorship components, pairing scholarship recipients with industry professionals to provide support

- (3) All secondary schools and TAFE institutions must implement further programs which encourage students into traditional stereotypical courses, these programs include but not limited to—
 - (a) women entering the technology field, and
 - (b) men entering caregiving roles
- (4) Schools and TAFE institutions should track gender representation in traditional stereotypical subjects and work on outreach programs in accordance
- (5) Gender-inclusive apprenticeships and traineeships shall be introduced and encouraged by career counsellors, these may be introduced in fields including but not limited to—
 - (a) IT, and
 - (b) engineering, and
 - (c) healthcare, and
 - (d) education

