

RESPONSE TO THE DISCUSSION PAPER: *Stronger futures for all young Victorians: discussion paper on the youth transitions system*

The Bendigo Region Careers Association (a regional group affiliated with the Careers Education Association of Victoria) met recently and discussed *Stronger futures for all young Victorians: discussion paper on the youth transitions system*. As a result of that meeting, we drew together the following response which we now submit for your consideration:

We welcome the discussion paper's focus on the importance of career development and its integral role in quality education services across all sectors.

Improved school retention, better student decision making, successful student transitions and young people who are able to manage their own career development through lifelong learning are all key concerns for careers practitioners and it is very encouraging to see that this paper brings these matters to the forefront of discussion.

Careers practitioners need adequate time and skill development (including networking opportunities) to continue to provide quality services. To improve delivery quality further, it's essential that a funding model that enables adequate staffing levels and time release be developed.

One of the ongoing challenges for careers education is the ageing workforce and high turnover of personnel in the careers field in schools. Some of this is because of the unrealistic time allowances provided in many schools and, sometimes, the role is not recognized as an essential feature of the school. The high demands of the job leave many burnt out. The current funding model often results in less than ideal staffing arrangements within schools. Better recognition in terms of time allowances and better initial training in career development programs will help improve this situation. There is also a need to provide careers practitioners with opportunities for continual development as the role of the careers practitioner is ever changing. Something that should be explored more is the compulsory inclusion of career development theory and practice in teacher training programs.

Educating parents and helping parents understand the changing nature of industry and career transition pathways is seen as core business by careers practitioners in schools. Yet, this aspect of our work is almost overlooked completely in the discussion paper. It's essential that this part of our role be recognized and adequately resourced.

Similarly, there should be a focus on the particular careers needs of students with disabilities. Young people with disabilities should also have a profile in this report and have their needs addressed/raised whether or not they are in receipt of special funding such as the Victorian DEECD funding under the Program for Students with Disabilities.

We are encouraged by the paper's recommendation for the development of a careers curriculum for all students but we recognize that this will not be the sole solution to issues relating to student connectedness. While there is much to be done in skilling teachers across the board to assist students to cope better with transition points through their schooling and beyond, it is also essential that any delivery model maintain opportunities for all students and parents to meet with a qualified careers practitioner in a counselling situation on more than one occasion in the students' years at school. To achieve this will require improved staffing levels and resources.

Students at risk will also continue to need targeted guidance and skilled support. The level of support they will need will also demand one-on-one counseling, above that assumed for most students.

The current situation where programs for students at risk are by and large delivered by external agencies reliant on short term government funding is also problematic. Consistency of service is difficult as projects are subject to the vagaries of tendering procedures; personnel have little security of tenure and issues relating to the ongoing support for students

are constant because programs come and go, depending on which agency secures the funding and which government body is offering it. It's not unusual for case workers in our area to have to look for transition options for many disengaged young people when their program's funding runs out or when another agency secures the tender. For young people who are already disconnected, this fragmentation of service is an additional hurdle. Students at risk are entitled to better than this. Often, the money would be better spent delivering a service at the local school level.

While the development of a targeted careers curriculum has merit, we have some concerns:

- It needs to have value that's not measured through the current assessment procedures
- It needs to be able to fit in to a pastoral model of delivery
- It needs to be supported with adequate training for teachers delivering the program, who may not be careers practitioners
- It needs careful coordination and leadership by appropriately qualified staff
- It needs to be supported by PD that assists careers practitioners to roll out any curriculum

In addition we recommend the expansion of the study grant program currently in place to enable more people to participate and to raise qualification levels. We also recommend that some of these study grants include time release in addition to course fee support. Applicants could be given a choice to take one or the other or a mix.

The Careers Practitioner plays a vital role in a school, being involved in activities as varied as curriculum development and delivery, advocacy and advice, community capacity building, career counselling, team leadership and the delivery of career development activities that promote lifelong learning and sound career decision making. In addition to this, they are often called on to do job placement activities, advertise opportunities, market programs and mentor students through various complex selection and decision making processes. Their skills, knowledge and expertise are central to the issues raised in the discussion paper. With proper resourcing and support, great things can be achieved.

We understand that our state body, the CEAV, will be pivotal in providing guidance and recommendations relating to these and other matters.

Yours sincerely

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