

Questions:

How can we continue to improve the current youth transitions system? Strengthening literacy and numeracy in the post-compulsory years

Q. What form should the proposed literacy and numeracy standards take?

A national benchmark based on 'employability' literacy and numeracy standards as opposed to those required to enter tertiary education – as they are not always the same. The standards should be represented by a scale or 'levels' with explicit descriptors that are well defined and clearly understood by employers. The levels should not be standardised, that is, no manipulation of student raw data to fit into a bell curve or to account for relative achievement compared to others at the same school or year level. Rate of student of improvement should also be acknowledged.

Q. In what other ways can the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills be strengthened in the post-compulsory years?

- A 'whole-school' approach to literacy. E.g. *Sunlight Program @ Sunshine College*– based on the Dr. Carol Christenson model (from UQ's School of Education), teaches basic literacy skills. Result from this program have been astounding and not just restricted to students' literacy rates, with fundamental motivation and stance towards academic achievement also showing dramatic change. Dr Christensen, has been working with schools across Australia to improve literacy standards through her 'Whole School Literacy; programs with dramatic results. Currently, working with the Tasmanian Department of Education to infiltrate Literacy Program throughout schools in Tasmania.
- There is a need to up-skill ALL teaching staff so they can provide a comprehensive literacy program throughout all years of education. An integrated approach to literacy and numeracy in all subjects post Year 10, so that a Biology teacher corrects for sentence structure, spelling and punctuation just as vigorously as an English teacher. Strategies to encourage reading for pleasure to be incorporated into teaching/school pedagogy where ever possible – facilitating tacit literacy acquisition. The Twilight series of novels has done wonders for many a 13 year old girl.
- Interventions to help with the transition years. E.g. transition from primary to secondary education. Decrease number the amount of teachers a student has at the beginning of their secondary education – have 3 main teachers in Yr 7 & Yr 8, more of a primary-school approach, rather than a separate teacher for each subject. Reducing the number of teachers a student has in early years of secondary, will help teachers identify as-risk students who may be falling below the NAPLAN benchmarks and potentially help to make it a smooth transition.

- Sharing data and/or the results of the proposed literacy and numeracy standard with other education providers (TAFE, ACE...) to facilitate early identification of those students requiring extra support.

Support for making informed education and training choices.

Q. Will a career plan strengthen young people's engagement with education and their capacity to make informed study and career choices both during schooling and in subsequent education, training and employment settings?

- It is said that young people who have future aspiration and goals are more likely to be engaged and participate in education/employment, however for most young people and indeed for all other adults if they can remember; it is normal not know what you want to do.
- This approach – career plans for secondary students may help some students misses the point regarding the main reasons for disengagement, which are often linked to non vocational barriers. Whilst the strategies discussed in the discussion paper can assist and support informed decision career choices they are no guarantee that students will not change their minds. Implementing career plans for secondary students is like the pharmaceutical industry in some countries who create a product, then market a complaint in order to sell their solution. Career plans are not the answer for student disengagement.
- Preparation and aspirations for careers should be less about the steps required or the career plan needed to become a doctor, engineer, bricklayer or CEO and more about confidence, self belief, team skills, tolerance, resilience, compassion, hard work, ethics, networking and effective communication skills needed to succeed in the workplace. If students leave school with positive self belief, drive and desire to contribute, their career will look after itself.
- A structured career plan is counter intuitive in contemporary western labour markets, whereby most people will not have a job for life, but varying roles and new opportunities. Generic, transferable skills will support people in the future labour market not their Year 9 career plan. Young people today change careers paths on an average of 9 times during their lives. Ex students who were early school leavers often report when aged over 20 that they now wish they had stayed at school; the wisdom of hindsight. This reflection is possible because they have matured and are aged 20 not 15 and not because they didn't have a career plan prepared by a careers teacher – other strategies to encourage school retention that don't rely on having a career plan are also needed. If we are to consider what contributes to low turnover for employers, perhaps we can translate these attributes to schools – feeling valued, making a contribution, meaningful work, recognition and acknowledgement, support, good management, opportunity to progress, friendship....

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- Often people narrow what they want to do by eliminating what they don't want to do – only realistic work experience and real understanding about what people actually do in their jobs helps this rather than aspiring to unrealistic dreams/fantasy regarding what is involved or status.

Q. What other actions should be taken to ensure that sound career development services are available to all young Victorian's?

- Focus on generic employability skills rather than the pre requisites needed for specific courses (see previous response)
- Provide opportunities for students to learn about what a typical day or week is like for certain occupations rather than what course you need to do
- Careers teacher training place to much emphasis on the process in lieu of practical understanding of what different jobs or careers actually involve
- Importance of recognition of careers teachers within the school.
- Must have skilled careers advisors – employ skilled workers and constant professional development. Approx 20 per cent of current career staff do not have any specialist training. Should be a legal requirement for schools to employ qualified careers staff.
- Must be a full time careers teacher within the school, not just added to teacher's workload.
- Need to create an even spread of careers teachers across the educational sector, fill the current gaps by utilising industry specialist to provide integrated industry career advice and knowledge to students in all schools
- Improve parents understanding of careers options and pathways – encourage their involvement in supporting the young person to effective engage in further education/career.
- Provide a multifaceted approach to career options and further education pathways – need to improve the quality of information on apprenticeships, traineeships and employment opportunities. Rather than just focusing on university and TAFE courses.
- Tailor programs accordingly with at 'at-risk' young people – such as CALD, Indigenous, low-socioeconomic etc.

Q. How can business/industry be more involved in assisting student's career choices?

- Create better links between local industry, community and the school. Develop partnership through networking and embed the engagement of community and industry into the schools core business.
- Industry experts to visit schools and explain practical, personal and all other skill sets and attributes as well as pathway information

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- Aware of resources available outside of the school. Actively seek information from industry and community and maintain up-to-date and accurate information.
- Community engagement/development programs and interventions that involve students. Harness community participation projects and link to the community sector. Great example is the Hands on Learning Program targets students who have disconnected from school. Small group work with local artisans and teachers on practical and creative projects, such as a new building structure, kitchen garden or painting. By involving local business/industry with programs such as Hands on Learning, it allows young people to participate in active learning and helps assist them to make informed career choices. Evidence indicates that the Hands on Learning have increased employment rates with participants.

Arrangements that support and encourage young people to complete qualifications

Q. What would further strengthen the delivery partnership between government and non-government schools and between schools and VET providers?

- Resource sharing and collaboration (compulsory)
- Encourage networks and partnerships between schools – through encouraging teachers/support staff to attend meetings.
- Replicate the Inner Melbourne VET Cluster model – they bring together government and non government schools to provide a comprehensive VETiS program in the Inner City areas of Melbourne (www.imvc.org.au)

Q. What additional actions should Government take to support young people to complete initial qualifications in the VET sector?

Make it free.

Q. Would greater levels of institutional specialisation in curriculum and qualification delivery result in improved quality of provisions, and support increased student attainment of Yr 12 or an equivalent vocational qualification?

It may work for *some* students, but consider again what attributes of an organisation or employer contribute to adults remaining engaged and productive, then translate these to the schools as much as possible given the lack of financial incentives to students. Preference is for less reliance on preparing students to achieve high enter scores and instead greater focus on citizenship to encourage and celebrate school achievement and completion – this would also facilitate capacity to place greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy by freeing up space in the curriculum timetable.

Q. How should schools, VET providers and system authorities use the new transparency and accountability arrangements in Victorian schools and Victorian Student Number to improve the completion rate of Year 12 or equivalent qualifications?

Develop procedures and protocols for identification of non completers and sharing of information between sectors so that those at risk of non completion are counselled/case managed etc to receive support and advice to re-engage or assistance to remain at the new institution given previous history of non completion.

Q. What other strategies could be introduced to lift qualification completion rates for young people in the schools and VET sectors?

Make it free.

Q. How can business and industry be involved in increasing completion rates – especially for apprenticeships?

Greater industry input to course structure and curriculum leading to increased confidence in the sector, leading to greater involvement and willingness to provide opportunities to students. Consider how hospitals are integrated with medical and nursing schools in universities leading to student opportunities for employment.

Systems that assist students to move effectively between courses, institutions and sectors.

How can student's transition to VET sector, higher education and full-time employment be improved?

- Implement broader eligibility criteria for entry, recognising enter scores only work effectively as a predictor of academic success for those with scores in top 20th percentile, consider 'citizenship' factors for entry
- Streamline articulation protocols between sectors, support shared goals, policy and processes that contribute to seamless and cohesive transitions
- Improve 'life-skills' development and again embed into the curriculum.
- Develop departments/interventions such as 'Swinburne TAFE's First Stop' within every school, allows young people to have access to make informed decisions re: pathways etc.

What other steps are required to assist schools' connection to the world of work?

- Encourage more skilled professionals from a wide variety of industries to enter teaching and remunerate competitively
- Important to link school to community and industry – provide industry taster programs
- Improve relationships between Universities and schools.
- Teacher exchange programs with industry

What other initiatives would improve school to tertiary education articulation and support young people to take advantage of expansions of these sectors?

- Increase contact with further education providers and create programs that allow young people to make contact with providers. E.g. making core component for tertiary education providers to attend schools and provide information on course and careers advice. Integrate into a 'careers development program'
- Enable part time attendance in senior secondary school years and develop innovative place based alternative education programs where needed and feasible to support retention
- Provide taster careers day – demonstrate to young people what real industry is all about and get some hands on experience.
- Help young people to develop a clear understanding of career pathways – again emphasising the importance of creating a solid career development program within the educational curriculum.

Articulation within the VET sector and from VET to higher education

Should efforts to improve VET to higher education articulation and credit arrangements focus on particular occupation pathways and skill priority areas, for example in engineering and nursing?

- Providing young people to attain a qualification in engineering/nursing could be potentially highly effective. However, it needs to be a process that still involves flexibility to allow the young person to change course if needed.
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- By providing the young person with an ambition to reach the goal would motivate the young person to stay connected to education and give the young person meaning.

How can governments ensure that reforms to the VET and higher education sector address both skills needs and student demand for particular qualifications?

- Firstly, the current skill shortages need to be identified at the time and improved processes for determining skill shortages need to be explored. The government then needs to work in partnership with the universities and TAFE sectors to address the current skills shortages. Needs to become an embedded process in higher education placement allocation allotment.
- The government for example could provide funding incentives to support university to allocate higher numbers of placements for identified skill shortage areas.
- Need to also work with the young people to encourage further studies in courses that are in current skill shortage. Provide incentives for young people to enrol into the skill shortage area. Could link this information to a 'career development program' within school.

How can governments improve provision and articulation arrangements to better support young people, especially in regional and rural areas, to access tertiary qualifications without needing to re-locate?

- Provide more support/funding to regional institutes to allow them to be able to provide higher levels of qualifications. Currently limited options available for young people in regional and rural areas to pursue tertiary qualifications.
- Improve the current 'poor morale around attending regional and rural education institute, a negative stigma attached. It is not a highly recognised qualification, therefore why study there?
- Increase access to online education services and promote in the regional/rural areas. Incorporate this information into a career development program in these regions.

What other actions should be contemplated by institutions and government?

- Need to create a system that is universal – especially in terms of the credit system. Create a transparent system that is clear and coherent.
- Develop online services to help young people understand pathways. The Melbourne Inner VET Cluster (www.imvc.org.au) in partnership with this LLEN and others is re developing an

- online resource called MYPath. MyPath is an online community resource that will allow disengaged young people, their service providers and anyone else follow a series of selections based on their life circumstance and school experience/status to select appropriate courses in the inner city area including TAFE, ACE, Alternative Education as well as secondary school and university.

Opportunities for young people to re-engage with education and training

How can youth connections be implemented in Victoria to most effectively re-engage young people with education and training?

- Provide a collaborative approach to service delivery. Make sure the Youth Connections worker/provider works in partnership with service delivery agencies and with educational providers. Embed the requirement for schools to work with YC providers instead of some of the barriers to support from them placed by some schools and or their student welfare staff
- Leverage their difference from the school staff to engage with students, utilise youth worker methodologies to engage students, create separate but on site 'drop in' centre run by the YC provider
- YC providers should attend transition processes, information evenings, school assemblies at the start of the year to communicate their role, their difference from the teaching staff etc
- Create a systemic approach to the youth connection service delivery, by developing a clear and cohesive referral system that is transparent across the state.
- Provide clarity to education providers and service providers involved in the youth connections program – highlight the role of the worker and also provide information to young people and parents around the service.

What services should Youth Connection Service providers use to establish effective referral and working arrangements?

- Systematic approach to referral – within each YC LGA, creates a system that supports the youth connections program – shared databases, IT programs to support information exchange

- By creating a program that is well supported, it will enable the best possible service delivery approach and give the young person the most appropriate support.

Should LLENs be provided some flexibility to facilitate broker service provisions to young people 20 and over, in line with the flexibility to Youth Connections service providers?

The Capital City LLEN, has brokered several re-engagement partnerships for early school leavers. Our partners, the organisations delivering these initiatives or programs will enrol, if there are places, otherwise eligible early school leavers who may be aged over 19 -but under 25. So, there is precedence for brokering service provisions to young people aged over 20 and we have no concerns about our capacity to include this increased age group.

However, it will vary depending on the LLEN and their region for the need. Also, LLEN funding is mainly contingent on numbers of at risk secondary school students – so there needs to be capacity and changes to the funding model to recognise the work LLENs, like ours so whereby we provide partnership brokerage to support re-engagement of early school leavers as opposed to a focus on retention within secondary schools.

Policy that supports flexible options that support educational attainment for all young people is positive.

Is the range of qualifications on offer to re-engage young people adequate?

There seems to be gaps in the system, depending on where young person is located and if there is an appropriate education provider available. For example, some areas don't have alternative education program available. Important to take action and increase the number of alternative education settings available in appropriate areas such as areas where there are high levels of disengaged young people.

Some schools only offer VCE; work with schools to implement VCAL programs. Need to alleviate the stigma attached to VCAL as it is not just for unintelligent students, just a different style of learning. There is need for education providers to embrace positive discussions around VCAL.

- Increase the number of alternative education settings – for those who are completed disengaged – to re-engage.
- Need to alleviate the stigma attached to VCAL – not just for unintelligent students – different style of learning. Need for education provider to embrace positive discussions of VCAL, and de-stigmatise negatives
- VCAL approach should be available from Year 7