



The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd
A response to:

Stronger futures for all young Victorians
Discussion paper on the youth transitions system

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The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (DIIRD) discussion paper on the youth transitions system entitled '*Stronger futures for all young Victorians*'. This discussion paper provides the Catholic Education sector with an opportunity to provide input on future key directions in education and training in Victoria.

This submission has been developed through a consultation process involving key members of the four Victorian Catholic Diocesan Education Offices.

How can we continue to improve the current youth transitions system?

Initiatives embedded in the National Partnership Agenda for attainment and successful transitions are designed to support and guide the transition of young people into employment and/or further education and training. Work on the national curriculum provides further opportunity to address ways to improve the current youth transition system, particularly in the work centred on improving senior school literacy (Essential English) and numeracy (Essential Mathematics).

The growth of Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs in schools has broadened pathways opportunities for students, and has contributed to increased retention

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and completion rates of Year 12 certificates (VCE and VCAL) or their equivalent. The development of VET has also stimulated significant change in school policies, partnerships and operations, particularly through engagement with federal and state policies and various funded programs.

Critical to addressing issues raised in the *Stronger Future's* discussion paper is the endorsement and leadership of senior personnel in school settings with reference to the need for pedagogy appropriate to all students in their care. Those in positions of leadership need to recognise and understand current research findings and to bring their staff to this understanding. Where schools lack this leadership, the flexibility of programs and integrity of teachers and students may be compromised.

In Victoria, education and training initiatives have been characterised by effective collaboration and cooperation between the Government, Catholic and Independent education sectors. This relationship has helped the CECV to further build its capacity to align its education and training priorities to meet State and Australian Government targets. It is imperative that the Catholic Education sector has appropriate capacity to meet government targets of increased retention and successful transition.

The discussion paper assumes that all education sectors in Victoria are funded to the same level. The State Government's funding allocation for pathways and transition is inequitable. Rather than strengthening delivery partnerships, funding disparities experienced by the Catholic sector restrict the development of, and active participation in, collaborative arrangements. Given the links between attainment and successful transitions, the capacity of Catholic schools to meet the training needs and aspirations of all students is compromised. This funding disparity could potentially jeopardise participation in cross-sectoral initiatives such as Trade Training Centres in Schools (TTC) partnerships and long standing VETiS cluster arrangements.

Strengthening literacy and numeracy in the post-compulsory years

The recognition in the Discussion Paper on the youth transitions system of the need to address literacy and numeracy has implications for pre-service training of teachers as well as ongoing professional learning opportunities for established teachers. The following may assist in strengthening literacy and numeracy:

- Support for the development of Essential English in the National Curriculum which focuses on further development of literacy and language skills that enable effective participation in workplace, education and training settings, and social, community and civic life may assist a significant cohort of students to be work ready or have the literacy skills to continue in further education and training
- Support for the development of Essential Mathematics in the National Curriculum which focuses on providing students with the numeracy skills and understanding to solve problems and undertake investigations in a range of workplace, personal, training and community settings may assist a significant number of students to transition into the workforce. Students need to be cognisant of workplace demands for numeracy including accuracy, transfer, and adaptable knowledge (data, networks)
- More emphasis on developing the use in information and communication technologies (IT literacy)
- Additional literacy and numeracy support for teachers providing workplace training opportunities for students with disabilities or learning difficulties

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- More emphasis on literacy skills, particularly those that form the basis of a number of Further Education certificates. Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) provide alternative options for students whose skill levels are not always able to be met through VELS
- Further develop literacy and numeracy resources that are designed specifically for teachers and/or trainers of VET, VCAL, Careers Education and Structured Workplace Learning. There is a strong need to enhance the literacy and numeracy skills within Units of Competence (UoC) in VET courses across all industries, and within all workplace environments. Programs that deliver literacy and numeracy skills and understandings through a series of 'hands on' approaches, processes and strategies should be common to all training packages
- VETsteps (a model from Western Australia) is one such program that supports teachers in delivering workplace literacy. Schools could access a range of comprehensive and highly practical VETsteps Professional Learning courses to strengthen literacy skills

Support for making informed education and training choices

The CECV is mindful that the decisions and commitments made by young people during and immediately after secondary schooling may go through a number of changes. Matters of program design and access, teacher professional learning for career development and information and communication technologies can create greater opportunities for successful retention and completion among those in transition from secondary education to higher education and or the workforce. The following points need consideration:

- Provision of professional and independent career advice so educational choices can be truly based on career aspirations and good information about options
- The experience of a 'training' culture prepares students for continued engagement in VET post school (lifelong learners). Research within the Victorian Catholic sector (Polesel, Keating and Volkoff, 2008) indicated that students who participate in VET are three times more likely to take up a training option post school
- Strengthening partnerships between schools, clusters, employers and industry bodies to maximise opportunities for young people to experience workplace learning
- Adoption of strategies that improve, particularly at a school level, the understanding and promotion of opportunities that exist within VET Block Credit Arrangements to broaden the range of programs students can access
- Greater attention to VET pathways in pre-service training so that future teachers will have an understanding of and appreciation for the multiple pathways for all students
- On going support for School-based Apprenticeships (SbAs) via support from SbA field officers appointed under the National Partnership for Youth Attainment and Transition strategy
- The value and efficiency of supportive auspicing arrangements between RTOs and schools and within school cluster arrangements
- Networks for RTOS and School program deliverers to share practice and professional development experiences

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- The capacity for initiatives such as Themed VCAL to broaden opportunities and provision. Such programs are dependent on collaboration, networking and intensive mapping of individual student pathways
- The provision of incentives for the training (and/or re-training) of staff to gain current industry training experiences
- Strong industry - school partnerships that lead to further training and constructive employment opportunities for young people. We need a competitive training market influenced and supported by industry and employers
- Continued and increased engagement and promotion of the benefits to young people of VET in Schools programs and SWL experiences to peak employer groups and industry in general
- Additional funding and training for teachers in VETiS to be able to both visit and assess students in the workplace (SWL)

Arrangements that support and encourage young people to complete qualifications

The further strengthening of collaboration between Government and Catholic schools to provide quality education and training outcomes will be assisted by:

- Developing a more inclusive curriculum by addressing the relevance of the curriculum and the type of tasks used. Students need to make the connection between what they do and learn at school to their future vocational needs. Without that connection there is a high risk of disengagement from learning. VCAL has addressed this issue for a significant number of students
- Catholic schools receiving equitable State Government funding support for VETiS band funding to address the current disparity between education sectors. This disparity (of \$377 per student in the top VETiS band) compromises sustainable partnership arrangements
- Levels of funding equivalent to the Government sector for VCAL Coordination, individual pathways planning and Indigenous training support in Catholic schools to facilitate effective cross-sectoral partnership arrangements
- A coordinated local/regional approach to agreed specialised provision that is accessible at a cross-sectoral level and has the potential to meet increased education and industry outcomes. This can be achieved via the Trade Training Centres (TTC) initiative and the Themed Industry Programs Project, which is presently being piloted across three Victorian school sites. Targeted skills shortages addressed through these initiatives and other school-developed partnerships should be encouraged, supported and further developed
- Making VET more affordable by having a consistent approach in establishing the cost of VET delivery among all providers. Currently, because of the different funding models, charges to schools by TAFE and other RTOs can vary considerably
- Encouraging earlier commencement of VET to give young people the opportunity to learn about VET pathways, competency learning and the world of work
- Further promoting Structured Workplace Learning for VET students and for VET teachers to be given sufficient release time to visit and assess students in the workplace

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- Providing students with more high level VET options including school based apprenticeships
- Continuing with senior secondary school reforms to provide more learning choices particularly in the area of VET and individual learning plans
- Encouraging Government and LLENs to foster the development of corporate social responsibility (using the European model) to further enhance industry partnerships with schools in developing training and work-based learning opportunities. Corporations to be encouraged to work with educators, governments, and industry to help design and deliver innovative education programs
- Developing a systemic approach enabling VET teachers to access industry experience to gain relevant knowledge of current industry trends and practice
- Schools (and/or clusters of schools) specialising in one or more specific industry training areas and attracting qualified training staff with recent industry experience (e.g. college restaurant or college theatre operating as a business)

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

The following points may assist more effective movement between education and training providers:

- The flow chart in Appendix 1 (The VET System for 15-24 year olds, page 39) does not demonstrate existing opportunities that already exist for articulation between TAFE and Higher Education
- Further promotion of the Credit Matrix to assist pathways planning, articulation and recognition of prior learning
- Development of models of articulation in Certificate III training commencing at Year 10/11 with pathways to both TAFE and/or university after Year 12
- The RMIT VET initiative - 'Constructive Learning Initiative Melbourne Based' (CLIMB) - is an example of an articulated pathway through school, TAFE and Higher Education. It contains multiple entry and exit points, and includes industry as a key partner. These programs are based on a "taster" model exploring Building & Construction (Plumbing, Engineering, Electrical and Building & Construction) and Allied Health (Nursing, Aged Care, Community Services and Dental Assistant). Both programs enable students to complete Units in four areas, with the opportunity of specialisation in year 2. All Units provide credit for VCE, VCAL and further VET Training
- Building Pathways to Construction Program (RMIT) is a program offering VCE and VCAL students a pathway to Certificate IV in Building & Construction. On completion of Certificate IV the student may articulate into the Diploma of Building & Construction in his/her first post school year or decide to go directly into the workforce. The student then has the option of further articulation into Bachelor of Applied Science Construction or Bachelor of Project Management
- Further promotion of Higher Education's recognition of the Senior VCAL as an entry level for university study in areas including nursing and primary teaching. This is a model worthy of further exploration in other vocational areas

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

International comparisons suggest that far too few young Australians are completing senior secondary schooling. Some 77% of 25-34 year olds have completed upper secondary schooling. Australia ranks 20th in the OECD for senior secondary completion rates and is one of only 12 countries in the OECD with rates below 80%. Completing Year 12 only or Certificate I & II is no longer satisfactory in the 21st Century workplace. Job prospects are extremely poor for young people dropping out of school early. To stem the tide of early leaving, education authorities need to:

- Ensure the allocation and alignment of resources is addressing student need and provides flexible curriculum structures which allow for the widest learning options. Engage in student-focused planning so that resources can be deployed to meet the needs, interests, aptitudes and aspirations of all students
- Develop targeted flexible learning options to re-engage early school leavers
- Engage in the national partnerships on teacher quality, literacy and numeracy and low SES students and use the resources offered to develop re-engagement strategies. Encourage networks of schools to work together with business, industry and other agencies to create new options for students
- Improve the level of sophisticated career advice to individuals by improving the levels of pre-service and postgraduate education available to teachers; and allocating resources to offer individual support to those in greatest need
- Provide all students with individual learning plans and, where applicable, opportunities for mentoring
- Continue to introduce re-engagement programs for senior secondary students both to retain students at high risk of disengaging from education and training and to re-engage students who have already left school. Re-engagement may involve partnerships with external providers that are registered and authorised to deliver a senior secondary qualification
- The provision of adequate capital and recurrent funding for alternative educational settings to assure adequate completion rates for students not suited to mainstream schooling. This funding should acknowledge that these settings are more costly to run on a per capita basis. It would be appropriate for the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) to assist these students in alternative settings by brokering suitable provision arrangements with other education providers, employers, industry and other agencies
- The current financial penalty imposed on a person undertaking a qualification at the same certificate level restricts a young person's opportunity to re-train in an alternate field (which could be in a skills shortage area). Flexible support arrangements need to be in place to assist those young people wishing to change to a more viable career pathway

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