

Stronger Futures for all young Victorians

What form should the proposed literacy and numeracy standards take?

Not in a position to comment on this.

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

- Throughout the discussion paper and consultation attended, there seems to be some confusion about what is meant by “post – compulsory years” as students are now required to remain at school or an equivalent until age 17 years, which is likely to be Year 11 or more.
- It is felt that solely focussing on literacy and numeracy at the Year 9 level is too narrow, that students ranging from Years 8 to 10 can become disengaged due to poor literacy and numeracy skills and that literacy and numeracy support and strengthening is necessary throughout these years of schooling.
- NAPLAN results are currently unavailable to TAFE providers, so TAFE’s conduct an initial assessment of literacy and numeracy for all incoming students to identify those who need extra support, which can be a majority of students. It has been proposed that the TAFE assessment should be linked to NAPLAN testing and be able to build upon this through provision of a standard Transition Statement that travels with the student to their next education provider.
- It has been suggested that there has not been recognition that boys are “wired differently” and the abolition of technical schools has been a disaster for them. Students have not understood that they need literacy and numeracy basics for trades, including for comprehension of Occupational Health and Safety requirements, which is a minimum competency that employers must insist upon.
- Educators are concerned that Maths and English teaching does not equate to literacy and numeracy teaching and that further workforce development is required to provide sufficient literacy and numeracy specialist teaching staff to meet the demand.

Will a career plan strengthen young peoples’ engagement with education and their capacity to make informed study and career choices both during schooling and in subsequent education, training and employment settings?

- Consideration should be given as to whether the term “careers education and planning” is too narrow, many young people may find this quite difficult to articulate and perhaps believe it does not apply to them. It may be useful to focus on transitions and future planning to be more inclusive.
- In formulating a “career plan”, care needs to be taken that the planning is not too rigid, there is a need to be flexible to allow for changing circumstances and interests.
- A career plan should assist in strengthening young peoples’ engagement with education because it enables them to link their employment aspirations to the decisions they make about subject choices, initial qualifications and further

education and training pathways. This is particularly critical for early school leavers who are more likely to stay at school and complete an initial qualification if they can see the connection to future employment.

- The MIP's (Managed Individual Pathways) programs are seen as very important for students, but there is a need for standardization of their provision across all secondary school settings.
- A dedicated careers curriculum for Years 7 to 12 should be implemented across Victoria to enable students to make informed career and study choices throughout their schooling and beyond. This would ensure early school leavers also had access to careers advice for whatever period they remained engaged at school rather than disproportionately missing out because careers education has traditionally been provided in the senior years of schooling. However, careers education in the early years of secondary schooling would by necessity need to be more broad to ensure students do not narrow their focus too early.
- Careers education also needs to take into account that it may be hard for young people to map a career path when they don't really know what they want to do. Students may also have difficulty linking their subjects with careers. In these circumstances, careers staff need to assist students to create a broad map, which keeps their options open, and takes account of their interests and strengths to assist subject selections and map corresponding potential career paths.
- Careers staff need to have attained a minimum mandatory specialist training that ensures they have knowledge of all the education and vocational sectors, preferably through work placements, and can provide contemporary and informed advice to students about their further study, training and employment options.
- Careers education needs to be as dynamic and diverse as possible with the incorporation of a range of services and activities, and including presentations by further education providers, RTO's (registered training organizations), employer and industry bodies and opportunities to experience work experience placements.
- Whilst the establishment of Regional Careers Coaches to support education and training providers to improve services to students and their families is welcomed, there is a need to guard against these Coaches becoming "Region blinkered", particularly in rural areas, and not thinking beyond the region's specific employment needs, potentially limiting the aspirations of some students.
- Formal recognition is required that the Career Plan belongs to the student and not to the school, and that the plan needs to travel with the young person.

What other actions should be taken to ensure that sound career development services are available to all young Victorians?

- There should be provision of seamless career development services available to all young Victorians, irrespective of whether they are attending secondary school, TAFE, RTO or other training services.
- Development and intensive resourcing of specific careers mentoring programs for Koorie students, CALD students including refugees, and students from families who have experienced intergenerational poverty. For these students, a

holistic approach that involves extended family members gaining knowledge and understanding of options and supports available is essential.

How can business/industry be more involved in assisting students' career choices?

- Business and industry would be well served as the future employers of the students to be very clear about what skills and knowledge they expect from their staff, what various jobs entail, and to play an active role in communicating this directly to students through partnerships with schools and education and training providers which includes tours of the workplace, presentations and work experience placements.

What would further strengthen the delivery partnerships between government and non-government schools and between schools and VET providers?

- There needs to be recognition that partnerships with schools especially require time and support.
- A well coordinated transition system that incorporates TAFE, schools, ACE (Adult and Community Education) and other providers would be very helpful in addressing the current practice of simply trying to retain students at schools "at all costs". It needs to be ensured that students are receiving a meaningful education with realistic pathways suited to their needs.
- Models that have recently been established may also provide valuable learning about effective partnerships, including the hub models of University/TAFE/Secondary School recently adopted by Ballarat and Victoria Universities.

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

- The ability of students to engage is a crucial factor in whether they complete qualifications or not, and this is dependent upon the support provided by the educational institution.
- Applied learning and youth friendly facilities, hubs and not classrooms, can provide a welcoming environment for young people that assists them to engage in learning.
- Young people like to be "wired" all the time through being connected to the internet and other media, and education providers should be using ICT as a tool of engagement and education delivery method.
- A range of support services should be working in partnership with education providers to give support to students to deal with barriers which are impeding their engagement. There also needs to be policy and planning recognition that some students may take a few attempts to re-engage, and it is important to keep the door open to them.
- It would also be helpful if there was better integration of support services into the learning space, such as co-location in hub structures.
- Successful programs have been those that adapt to students' needs and flexibility needs to be encouraged by funding providers. For example, a group

of young mothers attend their education provider for 1.5 days per week doing VCAL, and spend the rest of the week using Facebook to access their educational materials.

- Whilst some students may respond better to an adult learning environment as described in the discussion paper, many educators have expressed concern that the adult learning environment offered at a TAFE is unsuitable for many young people who are insufficiently mature to cope with these demands and they gravitate back to more youth orientated areas. What has been successful is when agencies such as TAFE's can set up youth friendly learning areas to promote young people's engagement in learning.

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

- Whilst it may be of assistance to have greater levels of institutional specialisation in curriculum and qualification delivery to encourage an increased attainment of Year 12 or an equivalent vocational qualification there are a number of structural barriers that would also need to be addressed. These include the issue of zoning for secondary schools which can act to exclude students from education providers offering their preferred curriculum, or difficulties in being able to access such schools via public transport. Funding arrangements would also need to be sufficiently flexible to enable students to study within more than one stream or perhaps at more than one school or institution.
- In rural and regional areas, there can be a great disparity in being able to access further education or training, with limited choices available. One way to address this would be greater provision of online study courses or subjects that students could access from their home educational institution.

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

- Employability skills need to be more clearly defined (as they had been previously) in VET training, and be relevant to market needs.
- The new transparency and accountability arrangements and the Victorian Student Number could be used to improve the completion rate of Year 12 or equivalent qualifications for those students at high risk of disengagement due to family difficulties, which may lead to transiency and multiple changes of school or education provider. Such students should be targeted for intensive support.
- The AEDI (Australian Education Development Index) 2009 results indicate that children in the most economically disadvantaged communities have one-and-a half times the state average of vulnerability on 'one-or-more' and 'two-or more' domains. For those children assessed as not proficient in English, regardless of whether their language background is English or non-English, are highly vulnerable, with 70% vulnerable on two or more of the domains.

This has very serious implications for tracking these children and ensuring they receive intensive literacy support throughout their schooling to ensure they have the capacity to complete Year 12 or an equivalent qualification.

- For those students assessed as not proficient in English and who come from a non-English speaking background, intensive ESL (English as Second Language) support may be most appropriate.
- On the other hand, those students who are not proficient in English, but come from an English language background may represent families who have had generational low educational achievement and it should be recognized that this may take a generation to make a difference. This group of students may need intensive support that it is delivered quite differently and over an extended period, and recognizes their potential environmental deprivation as a factor.

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

- Educators have identified difficulties with students not understanding that when they receive upfront payments from Centrelink upon enrolment, they often don't comprehend their responsibilities. It was proposed that payments should be more like wages, with progress payments which included minimal levels of attendance and a bonus upon completion. This type of system has the advantage of modelling the rights and responsibilities of being a wage earner, which is what the young people will be aiming for when they complete their qualification, and it should be part of their training.
- Educators have emphasized that much of their frustration comes from contradictory policies between State and Federal educational and income support policies. This complexity could be addressed by taking a "student centred approach" which would highlight anomalies and guide resolution. This could be taken up at the Ministerial Conference level.

How can businesses and industry be involved in increasing completion rates – especially for apprenticeships?

- In addition to the services outlined in the discussion paper, such as the network of Apprenticeship Field Officers, and Apprentice Support Officers, there is a need for business and industry to accept that workplace supervisors need training, mentoring and support and that this is a worthwhile investment for them to make.
- Personal factors related to the apprentice's broader life circumstances can also have a major impact on their completion, making the establishment of a specialized EAP (Employee Assistance Program) for apprentices useful.

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

- Student transition between each of these sectors could be improved through the use of a credit matrix to ensure that recognition is provided consistently for prior learning and assessment.
- For example, many young people do community service, a Certificate III in hospitality as a requirement for their part-time work, but it is not recognized. However, it can be recognized if they are formally enrolled as part of VCE.

- Deakin University has a program on primary teaching with VCAL and VCE subjects leading into it.

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

- School based apprenticeships are important, but there are not enough places currently for those who would really benefit, and those who miss out have poor literacy and numeracy but could succeed well in the apprenticeship if this could be effectively addressed.

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

- Open Day type events, visits and presentations by the tertiary education sector would assist secondary students to become aware of what tertiary education involves. This process would be especially useful if secondary students could speak with those undertaking tertiary education or even undertake joint projects.
- The likely difficulty of creating a “student demand driven sector” is that the sector will not be able to expand sufficiently fast to cater to the needs of all students and supply will lag behind demand, causing many students to miss out when the timing of continuous learning is critical. Rigorous forward planning based on evidence is required to try to prevent this.
- Furthermore, the creation of a larger and more diverse cohort of students is likely to have the effect of pushing up the level of qualification required to secure the available jobs, which has occurred already in recent years. There is also a danger of a diverse cohort of students leading to an increasing hierarchy of tertiary education courses with only the highest leading on to employment. The system will therefore need to be very flexible and responsive to match education services to changing employment trends.

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

- It would not be helpful narrowly focus efforts to improve VET to higher education articulation and credit arrangements on particular occupational pathways and skill priority areas because circumstances can change fairly rapidly as the GFC (Global Financial Crisis) has demonstrated. There is a need for broad sector reform across the range of occupational pathways and skills areas.

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

- As stated previously, it is critically important that there is a match between skill needs, student demand for particular qualifications and both private and public industry needs, and for this to occur data driven forward planning is essential.

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?

- As stated previously, in rural and regional areas, there can be a great disparity in being able to access further education or training, with limited choices available. One way to address this would be greater provision of online study courses or subjects that students could access from their home educational institution.
- As mentioned in the discussion paper, a related course may be to expand the provision of higher education courses in TAFE institutes, either in partnership with universities or as stand-alone institutions. The former option may be preferable as it would confer the university's status upon the qualification, provide linkage to the university's broader resources and assist with articulation arrangements within the university itself and the higher education sector more generally. The benefit of the stand-alone institution is that student may be able to access more personalized learning and support from this smaller institution.

What other actions should be contemplated by institutions and government?

- Whilst the Commonwealth Government's revision of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program to better support the achievement of its goal that 20% of those enrolled in higher education will be from low socioeconomic status backgrounds is commendable, it is unlikely this figure is actually representative of those from low SES backgrounds within the population. Whilst 20% is an initial target, there should be plans to increase this target figure annually by perhaps 5%.
- For those children and young people in the care of the state, who have experienced extreme disadvantage and generally have poor educational outcomes, there should be a guarantee that the government (State and Federal jointly) will fully support the young person's choice to participate in higher education.

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

- Schools need to notify Youth Connections when students are at risk of dropping out and the priority cases should be Type 2 and not Type 1 as currently seems to be occurring.

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

- Youth Connections should facilitate cross sectoral collaboration and case management for as long as is required to confirm the young person has been firmly re-engaged with education and training.

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

- The current cut-off in eligibility for service from the LLENS at the age of 19 years is quite unhelpful, as many students re-engage with education and training in their early 20's. Both the LLEN's and Youth Connections should have the capacity and flexibility to offer services for young people aged from 15 – 24 years, consistent with the alignment of service boundaries for these two services and the service specification for Youth Connections that ensure coordination with LLENS and regional youth commitments.

Is the range of qualifications on offer to re-engage young people adequate? (Existing qualifications include VCAL, adult VCE, the General Certificate of Adult Education and the Diploma of Further Education.)

- It is felt that the range of qualifications is quite narrow when VET is removed. The VCAL profile needs improvement as it is currently perceived as a second best option that many students and families do not accept for this reason.

Other Issues:

- The census date in April can be problematic as students can be encouraged to remain in school until after that date and then transfer or disengage, but the school retains the full funding, when they are supposed to transfer this on to the new school if there is one. A preferable arrangement would be pro-rate management of the funding.
- There are issues with students aged 13 years and under disengaging from school and there are not services and resources there to support them.
- Currently, the ACE (Adult and Community Education) program is taking students under 15 because there are not other options for them.
- In rural areas there can be a particular problem when the young person disengages from the only school in the area, and the school indicates they are not willing to take the student back, even with supports.
- The current system requires that the student must be disengaged for 3 months before the program can work with them and this forfeits a valuable opportunity for early intervention.
- There should be "at risk" criteria for support services to be mobilized.
- Young boys in particular need to get the message that they must have a literacy and numeracy card before they can go to a traineeship, and employers would like this as it manages their risk in relation to Occupational Health and Safety requirements.
- It has been suggested that recent retirees could provide a pool of mentors for young people, which is a particularly attractive option considering the ageing of the population.
- There are major concerns that there are so many agencies and programs working with young people that sometimes they fall through the "chicken wire". Streamlining and coordination of service provision is urgently needed.
- Providers feel that the most valuable skills that educators can provide to young people relate to adaptability and resilience which will support them to manage

in a world where they will have multiple career changes and circumstances will change rapidly such as due to the GFC.

- There is an assumption that the provision of data to educators will enable them to undertake comprehensive analysis to support planning and targeted interventions. However, it is becoming apparent that the majority of educators do not have a background in statistical analysis and are unable to interpret and utilize the data now being provided to them.
- There is an urgent need for workforce development and training in statistical methods, analysis and evidence based planning before improvement in educational outcomes can be achieved.

Note:

It is also recommended that the recent submission to *Pathways to re-engagement through flexible learning options – A policy direction for consultation* facilitated by the OCSC is read in conjunction with this submission, given the substantial areas of cross over, in particular with the final section of this submission.

