

11th June 2010

Chisholm Institute's Response to the Discussion Paper on the Youth Transitions System: Stronger Futures for all Young Victorians

Strengthening literacy and numeracy in the post-compulsory years

What form should the proposed literacy and numeracy standards take?

The Australian Core Skills Framework is used in the VET context to map and report language, literacy and numeracy skills (LLN) and is the fundamental tool to commonly identify, report and thus speak about levels of competence in relation to LLN either as stand-alone skills or in the context of training and/or workplace requirements. This framework potentially could be used to map across the skills required for the senior secondary certificates thus bridging the requirements and reporting language of the two sectors.

Mapped literacy and numeracy standards to the senior secondary certificates and VET qualifications would not only identify levels of literacy and numeracy required to undertake the study but would also sign-post additional support a student may require to successfully complete if they do not meet the benchmark standards. The standards thus would not necessarily preclude entry, but would identify learning contexts and supports for students to be able to continue their educational pathways.

For an all-round approach to foundation skills, it would be important for the standards to include language requirements in addition to literacy. Language encompasses the oral aspects of speaking and listening skills which are in addition to the reading and writing foci of literacy. This is a significant differentiator if we are to include the requirements of young people from migrant background in the transition framework being developed. We would therefore propose that there be *language*, literacy and numeracy standards to acknowledge this understanding.

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

LLN taught in context is commonly accepted and demonstrated as a most effective approach to learning and student support. Integrated or co-taught skills in various models of delivery have been successfully employed for example within Chisholm's Technical Education Centre (TEC) for VCAL delivery which has correspondingly high student retention and successful completion. Integrated models are also employed in a range of other certificate I to III VET study options, thus affording students the opportunity to enter and pathway through studies in a supported way, building both general and industry related LLN, and acquiring VET certification at the same time. Early identification of LLN needs against a common standard would alert the provider to the need for development of a support program and subsequent student placement.

Where an individual is involved, a learning plan addressing actions and system-provided supports to achieve the desired requirements is a positive way forward. Supports may include development of and access to on-line tutors, small group workshops, cross-school or cross-sector providers for student skill development and the like.

Both the NQC and COAG recommendations within “VET Products for the 21st Century” for making the LLN requirements within VET qualifications explicit align with this approach and its proposed adoption as a principle for senior secondary certificates.

Support for making informed education and training choices

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?

A mobile career plan for each student is an excellent idea, helping to focus young people on an intended pathway or options for the future. To be effective it needs to be a fluid, evolving document as the student matures and gathers additional information and advice. It needs to follow the student as they journey through their study as part of their portfolio of documents as preparation towards their future.

It also needs to be non restrictive and acknowledge options so as not to narrow a student’s vision too early or hedge them into a choice which puts them at a potential financial disadvantage in the future having pursued an option or qualification which may not suit or provide the desired job outcomes expected. It is unreasonable to expect that all young people will have all their career choices sorted by the time they are 20. The option to move up, down or across the qualifications framework without financial penalty should therefore apply up to the age of 24.

A career plan hinges significantly upon the quality of the advice and direction given, therefore initiatives around the proposed careers curriculum which has application in secondary certificates, foundation skills courses and lower level VET courses in particular; and the building of professional skills of careers advisors, are critical. Minimum qualifications for careers staff as a standard to be phased in over time would support the initiative and the professional standing of the role.

In many ways *all* staff are careers staff and perhaps consideration can be given (at least within the TAFE sphere) of an elective within the Diploma of VET Practice to cover necessary skills and understandings relating to careers advice. An accredited professional development program across the sectors may be desirable.

Mentoring programs for specific at risk cohorts would certainly strengthen these students’ development and commitment to a career plan. Such a notion could also potentially continue to assist a student once they had transitioned into a study pathway or to the workforce.

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

Further to the comments above, the proposal for a career plan upon enrolment into VCE and VCAL has merit as does the notion of a careers curriculum. Both extend the concept of existing managed pathways plans for young at risk students as well as the current learning plans which are a requirement in many adult foundation courses such as the Certificates in General Education and the ESL framework.

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

There are a number of ways business/industry can be involved. The question is whether they will, given the potential for increased demand upon their levels of engagement in the proposed more integrated, holistic approach which incorporates classroom based and industry connected learning experiences for students. Many businesses will not continuously engage from an altruistic, social obligation perspective. They are not resourced to do so, particularly smaller sized businesses where even mentoring on a one to one basis is a significant drain on their time and resources. Engagement from the perspective of informing and skilling the next generation workforce is the key particularly for larger enterprises.

Business/industry provides valuable real-life experience for students unsure of industry areas or workplace requirements through on-site opportunities for both observation and placement, through acting as individual, group or school mentors, or as guest speakers and so on. These are all commonly used in the current system. There are certain industries that are perceived as unattractive by students as a career option. Targeted campaigns by industry peak bodies, local industry networks and individual enterprises could tackle this issue on a local or regional basis.

With increased demand upon industry, on-line talks, visual or virtual tours, out of hours chat rooms and so on may be another way of approaching this and lessening the continuous demand upon industry's time. Networks or school hubs connecting with industries within regions and the proposed Workplace Learning Coordinator program may also assist students build knowledge of industry and career opportunities.

There is however an element of education required for the participating businesses and industries themselves, often unsure and/or unable to provide the levels of support and engagement required by students participating on work placement or listening to industry speakers, to make their time of engagement for instance on site, as meaningful as it may have been. This includes understanding student cohorts and what exactly the talk, mentoring session, work experience or observation is about. Is it for pure industry knowledge or is it about workplace culture, safety or language for instance? A program which "inducts" workplace partners in a careers choices program potentially would make the program more effective.

Arrangements that support and encourage young people to complete qualifications

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

Partnerships which provided greater subject and learning environment choices for students would be valuable. A transparent system where students can engage in learning choices which build towards attainment of mandatory qualifications is ideal and could be effectively supported by networks of local schools and education providers linking services, subject choices and subsequent pathways within the local area. This would be a system-focused approach rather than an individual school or organization approach.

An administrative system then which centrally records student achievement towards a credential which each school/provider can access would be required and student progress able to be tracked through this and the discrete student number ID.

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

The government needs to invest in the development of more appropriate teacher practices with a focus on applied learning and project-based activity.

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

Potentially greater specialization could assist improved attainment rates. The danger is for an individual to specialize too early or without sufficient counseling to make a sound decision, so any such system would have to allow an opt-in, opt-out clause. There may also be common areas across specializations and consideration would have to be given to how these would be offered to students in a highly coordinated manner to maximize efficiencies.

Central to any improvement in attainment has to be an examination of teaching and learning practices. It is not just about “support services” linked or separate, or about identifying a pathway or career goal, although both are part of the total picture. At the core is whether or not the student is engaged. This includes engagement with the educational process in the classroom as well as engagement with peers and the life in general of a campus or school environment. It includes whether the teaching practices are flexible enough to cater for individual student needs and whether assessment practices are rigorous. An examination at the local level of teaching, learning and assessment practices needs to underpin any discussion of potential ways to improve quality of provision and student outcomes.

How should schools, VET providers 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?

As indicated previously partnerships which provide greater subject and learning environment choices for students are of value. A transparent system where students can engage in learning choices which build towards attainment of mandatory qualifications is ideal and could be delivered through networks of local schools and education providers linking services, subject choices and subsequent pathways within the local area.

An administrative system then which centrally records student achievement towards a credential which each school/provider can access would be required and student progress able to be tracked through this and the discrete student number ID.

Transparency of data would be a valuable tool for schools to examine completions, withdrawals, transfers and the like; to assess reasons for these and examine improvement strategies either as an individual provider of educational service or within a local school cluster.

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

Chisholm’s experience is contrary to the statement in the paper that “the volume of learning in many pre-apprenticeships does not fit easily within VCE and VCAL structures”. An integrated delivery approach between the requirements for the VCAL and the VET component allows students within the Chisholm program to complete both their VCAL and their full VET certificate II or III. Competencies between the two areas are cross-mapped and delivery encompasses teaching and assessment for both. Students are not required to add additional time to study and the mapping, whilst allowing a student to see the cross area requirements, allows for seamless delivery and attainment of competence for the student.

There are cohorts of students that require intensive ongoing monitoring and support to facilitate their engagement and success. Strategies encompassing role modeling and various individual and group mentoring strategies, which have been mentioned in the paper, are costly but necessary services. In addition, integrated delivery models for at risk students, for example those with LLN needs, can also be costly but significantly improve student opportunities for success.

Improved recognition of the often unrecognized skills and informal learning experiences of young people needs to be more formally acknowledged and become a recognized component of the student's pathway or career plan.

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

Perhaps a bonus payment for a successfully completing apprentice may motivate the business to provide quality supervision and on the job support? Businesses working in partnership with the training provider to identify opportunities for fast tracking a competency or the qualification, or conversely for providing additional training or support if this is identified on the job as a requirement for the individual would improve outcomes.

Can local industries also form a network with some on-line mentoring, career path talks etc which apprentices and/or others could access?

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

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

At a system level Career on Track, despite reportedly disappointing pilot statistics, has enormous potential. Voluntary self-referral to the service does not tackle the needs of a disengaged young person as they will not self refer. The process needs to be mandatory.

The development of clear and transparent articulation and credit transfer arrangements between courses and sectors, plus an accessible housing of these and authorized viewing of individual student achievement against them would facilitate movement and potentially break down some of the barriers related to access and referral.

Incorporation of higher level units of competence, modules of study from VET or Higher Education into senior secondary qualifications by way of a "Pathway to" concept may assist transition and have organizations working together to support this for the student/s. In the same way, workplace experience or workplace based modules of study could facilitate improved links to the world of work and/or immediate or longer term job opportunities.

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

For some cohorts pathway destinations are determined by family or cultural expectations. A program which also worked with ethnic or indigenous communities, and parents to assist them to understand educational options and pathways in Australia may broaden a young person's choices and lessen the generational or cultural tensions which currently exist within some communities and for some families. A program such as this potentially has application across the board, setting the context and expectation that there will be an educational pathway, a career expectation or job outcome.

Clear and formalised articulation pathways between sectors would minimise student confusion and provide a framework for individuals to make an informed choice.

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 occupational pathways and skill priority areas, for example in engineering and nursing?

The concept of limiting the ease of passage or transfer through an educational matrix based on skills shortages would certainly begin to address current need for skills and facilitate opportunity for attainment of a higher level qualification, however a balance with some longer term vision of industries and jobs for the future is also required. Realistically articulation and credit transfer should apply to any study regardless of skill shortages and the immediate need to address these, however as a starting point when demand is so great, this vehicle could indeed stimulate some of the required breakdown of sector barriers to a student progressing to higher levels of qualifications.

For stand-alone TAFEs such as Chisholm, articulation pathways to university and the development of dual qualifications have seeded partnership arrangements. Other initiatives include the development of academic study skills programs and skill gap courses to better articulate applicants missing on stipulated course prerequisites. The former tend to be demand driven, but also focus on areas of skill shortage/job opportunity.

With individualized arrangements between providers and organizations from differing sectors, there is variation in the system. A standard articulation and credit transfer arrangement would minimise confusion for the applicant but creates an interesting dialogue in a competitive market where localized or organization-specific arrangements could be an advantage.

Consideration should also be given to the development and formalizing of pathways for students who drop out of their university course into a VET course.

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?

In an age of computer technology and the flexibility it offers to students regarding access to study and its on-line options supported by various interactive networks, tutorials and face to face or distance communities of practice, regional and rural area issues of access are decreasing. Models such as The Deakin at your Doorstep initiative which utilizes local area facilities and technology to provide opportunity and access to a university pathway is an example. This however was a funded project with delivery infrastructure specifically costed in the set up of the project. Where such infrastructure does not exist, or where there are perceived or real barriers for those from low SES backgrounds for instance to access particular locations, an educational system where qualifications can be delivered cross-sector with the required levels of support or in partnership arrangements with the relevant parties, may indeed be the answer.

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?

- Provision of school-based at risk identification and student support programs
- Follow-up of all early school leavers and mandatory referral to counseling service/pathway planning advisory service of Career on Track pilot. The referral needs to be mandatory for young people up to the age of 17.
- Liaison with/provision of outreach services, informal interaction, hands-on workshops or activity based programs to build trust and potential to refer to more focused counseling and pathways planning services.
- Liaison and networking with the range of educational providers for youth programs aside from school based provision
- Liaison and networking with key youth transitions roles such as Koorie transition officers, workplace learning coordinators, LLENs, TAFE youth specific roles, ACFE regional and centre youth roles

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

Regions participating in the Career on Track, and TAFE Completions projects have also linked in with Better Youth Services pilots. Youth Connections service providers should now be able to access the information collated through the latter pilots to draw upon for information about regional support and referral agencies for young people at risk.

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?

It would appear currently that there are numerous resources available to support young people up to and inclusive of the age of 19. Another significant grouping is the next wave consisting of 20-24 year olds. This grouping is potentially more at risk having come through a system of differing supports to what is currently operating, and potentially from a time when services and opportunities were not as well recognized or coordinated.

Whether LLENs are the appropriate body to facilitate and broker service provision for this group into the future remains a moot point and there is merit in the proposal as the LLENs have facilitated and brokered on behalf of the younger age group, and are therefore familiar with the issues of the cohort. However, are all LLENs similarly placed or focused and resourced to do this effectively?

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

The scope within these is broad and allows flexible uptake, part or full time study plus the ability for training providers in a range of settings to tailor programs in terms of content and delivery approaches to individual student needs. In addition vocational programs offer another avenue for re-engagement in education and training.