

Stronger Futures for all young Victorians – Discussion Paper, May 2010

Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN Response

What forms should proposed Literacy and Numeracy Standards take?

In considering the discussion paper, we are mindful that changes to VET will impact on young people in schools and other VCE and VCAL providers.

Included in this group are young people with a disability who are in mainstream or special education and who may struggle to complete the full qualification but may benefit from doing part of a qualification.

What seems less clear in the paper is the recognition that changes may also impact on young people who have left education prior to completing Year 11/12 to enter apprenticeships and traineeships and who will complete the equivalent of Year 12 whilst in a contract with an individual employer.

The apprenticeship system is based on individual arrangements between employers and young people which are governed by the apprenticeship system, but which enable employers to enter into contractual arrangements with young people who will struggle to complete theoretical training and gain the final qualification as well as those young people who are completely ready for the task. As well as the risks inherent in this approach, it creates the basis for equity within the system – those most disadvantaged in the labour market can be supported by a range of employers who are willing to take on the challenge and provide on the job training to young people with special needs.

In determining the forms for proposed Literacy and Numeracy standards, we would suggest that all caution be taken to ensure that none of these young people is disadvantaged by new standards and that new standards do not limit or complicate their access to Vocational Education and Training as apprentices and trainees.

Strengthening the acquisition of Literacy and Numeracy skills in Post Compulsory years

The acquisition of Literacy and Numeracy skills will be enhanced long term by initiatives such as the Municipal Literacy Partnership in the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula.

In the short term and within the school setting, testing for and provision of programs to supplement literacy and numeracy skills acquisition is an achievable goal as is the provision of programs which are relevant to career and occupational goals.

For young people who are currently employed in a contract of training as apprentices/trainees and attending TAFE or a Registered Training Organisation as they undertake Certificate 11 or 111 qualifications, access to literacy and numeracy assessments and support is more problematic. This could be addressed to some extent by embedding literacy and numeracy in VET qualifications. However, these should form part of the provision at Certificate 11 and 111 levels rather than a pre-requisite. There would need to be a review of course content to accommodate additional units, which would need to be negotiated with industry and there would need to be more flexibility in training provision to allow young people the time to undertake additional units of literacy and numeracy without compromising their employment/time in the workplace.

Member Comment:

The mandatory requirement of funded courses through the Victorian Training Guarantee is for all students to do a literacy numeracy assessment – the reasoning behind this is to ensure the qualification enrolled in is achievable. This will disadvantage many if taken to the “letter of the law”.

Many RTO’s will assist their students to not only get through this assessment satisfactorily (as funding is reliant on it) but also through the actual qualification training (hopefully to support the student but it is again funding dependent).

This approach does not address the underlying issues of the lack of literacy and numeracy skills of school leavers.

These issues need to be identified and addressed at a much earlier stage of a student’s learning and probably in a school-based context.

Learning plans starting in grade 4 and carried through to end year 12 for all students

Resourcing pre schools and schools to achieve improvements in literacy and numeracy is paramount.

We need realistic entry levels into apprenticeships – the standard for entry, if introduced, should be the minimum standard required, not some arbitrary standard that bears no relation to the actual content of the material to be mastered.

Support for Making Informed Education and Training Choices

Our members from schools indicate there is a great disparity in the provision of Careers Education in our community. While a number of schools have full time, dedicated Careers Teachers, others have minimal time allotted to this task which may be undertaken in combination with one or more other key areas of responsibility. Peninsula Careers Education Association, whose members are Careers-trained professionals, analysed the amount of member time spent directly in Careers education to students. Feedback indicates we achieve a ratio that may be as low as .6 teacher to 1000 students in FMP schools compared to the OECD recommended ratio of 1 to 400 students.

A small number of schools employ School Support Officers to complement the careers role, to support MIPS and/or to undertake a transitions and pathways role with at risk students.

It would be fair to say that Career education is concentrated in the senior levels of schools with a focus on post -compulsory and post-VCE destinations including tertiary studies and that this may well be a strategy for coping with the low levels of available expertise.

Transition and pathways advisors regularly provide a careers advice role or have a role in advising at risk students on course selection. These positions do not usually require Careers qualifications. About one quarter of schools in the region have a dedicated transitions and pathways advisor some of whom work part time in this role.

The Career Plan

Members are agreed that formalised career and Managed Individual Pathways plans of individual students are an important component in the development of clearer and better articulated pathways within education and into training and employment. Members also agreed that this activity requires skilled facilitation by educators with an understanding of pathways across and between sectors.

Career plans are one of a range of tools required - they are reliant on the whole of school's flexibility in terms of supporting individual plans and making allowances for different plans/different subject mixes/time off from mainstream school

It is also agreed that formal plans are as strong or as weak as the schools' willingness and capacity to work with the individual student's needs and work to the plan. Plans are also reliant on the availability within the community of the organisations and programs which will support young people in their learning experiences outside of the classroom and in many cases, are reliant as well on industry being available and accessible for young people.

Individual Learning Plans should include support from Careers Personnel, tutors and mentors. Learning how to learn should be part of a learning plan. Parental or carer involvement should be an essential component particularly in primary school and through to year 8.

In the case of young people undertaking school based apprenticeships and traineeships – including those young people who have a direct career goal - schools struggle to support the needs of the individual learner, often requiring young people to make up time and make up subjects which may or may not contribute to their success on their chosen apprenticeship pathway.

School based apprenticeship pathway may not be seen as having parity with internal school pathways. Young people can take up a school based apprenticeship as long as they strive to keep up with their classroom based peers, otherwise they will be disadvantaged if they need to return to school.

Whilst schools may go to great lengths to provide a safety net for those who may change their mind about an apprenticeship pathway and return to school, the additional workload can prove the breaking point for young people including young people at risk of early school leaving who are connected to school primarily for the purposes of completing the one qualification – their school based apprenticeship which, at Certificate 11 level, is currently a Year 12 equivalent program.

We would strongly recommend that the learning from the school based apprenticeship system be considered in the development and implementation of Career Plans and in particular, there is a need to highlight good practice of schools with the flexible approach that supports young people, most importantly young people at risk, in school based apprenticeships as their primary pathway. In this way, schools might be encouraged to consider Career planning as holding more weight than an academic exercise.

Ensuring sound Career development services

As indicated above, Careers services in schools in the FMP region vary greatly from school to school suggesting that Careers education remains an add on rather than a mainstream curriculum area. For members who are Careers educators, the challenge is to prioritise their service and ensure that at least some of the young people receive support. In most cases, this will be young people negotiating tertiary pathways, given the complexity of the system and the priority placed on tertiary transitions as a sign of successful outcomes for a school.

Career development activities in the trades and related areas may also be a focus, particularly where the Careers educator also has responsibility for VET and VCAL. Clustering of schools and involving community VCAL providers in cluster activities also improves the range and quality of career development activities available and with co-ordination, can reduce the range of demands placed on local employers.

However, the success of a school in assisting a young person to take up a mainstream apprenticeship, prior to completing VCE or VCAL, is not necessarily deemed to be the same sort of satisfactory outcome for the school as a direct transition to tertiary education since these young people remain classified as early school leavers for the purposes of DEECD reports.

To encourage schools to support individual young people on the pathway most likely to lead to completion of a program which is the equivalent of Year 12, it is important to address this discrepancy in the way the performance of schools is assessed.

Careers teachers are often ill equipped to deliver the support required by exiting students or students at risk.

Transitions services remain ad hoc and dependent on the ability of the school to fund the service.

The system requires Career Educators – professionals with education, training, business and industry backgrounds and they need to be recruited from outside the school - personnel with established business/industry links and greater understanding of options post school.

Careers education requires skilled professionals which impacts on school budgets

Careers education needs to reach parents and families as the primary source of information/influence related to the careers choices of young people

Careers educators need an enhanced understanding of articulation and credit transfer in the VET system as well as the education system

Every school should be required to have a full-time Careers Teacher in every school to oversee curriculum from years 7 – 12. This person needs to have teaching qualifications as well as a minimum qualification of Certificate 1V in Careers training.

In line with the OECD recommendation, one full-time qualified careers counsellor should be employed in every school for each 400 students.

Quality career planning is needed. Students must own the plan – much more investment of time on research and discussion must go into the plan than often happens with current MIPS plans.

Students disengaged from school must have viable alternative programs to engage them allowing for flexibility in their schooling, with all programs congruent with the individual Pathways and Learning Plans.

How can business/industry be involved?

Local business and industry has a key role in providing career related work experience and structured workplace learning opportunities which will no doubt improve with the implementation of the Workplace Learning Co-ordinators Program.

Business/industry need more clearly defined roles in terms of promoting occupational and career pathways in schools

Some consideration needs to be given to providing additional resources to support students to access industry sectors outside their own region particularly where the region has a narrow spread of industry represented

Every workplace provides learning opportunities for students. We need to do more as a community to link this learning to school based learning and to recognise it as a valid part of curriculum. This in turn might help us to bring industry and business into the mainstream of education.

Support Young People to Complete Qualifications

Enrolment in VET 1 and 11 Certificates can and should be flexible enough to provide an experimental rather than a life defining choice for young people. This enables young people to explore learning styles, careers and occupations and provides them with the stepping stones to higher level qualifications.

In particular, it may offer the first and only experience of different working environments and potential occupations for young people who live in disadvantaged communities and generational poverty.

At the same time, it may support young people in part time work to gain some credit for their before or after school job, given that part time employment contributes positively to the school experience of most young people and in some cases, provides the financial support for them to remain at school.

With better understanding of and more adherence to the credit transfer system, VET programs could start earlier in schools and provide a legitimate school pathway, from the early years to VCAL/VCE and Certificate 111 and above programs at TAFE.

To support this, all disincentives to completion of low level qualifications (including multiple programs at Cert 1 and 11) need to be removed for young people under age 17 as a minimum.

In relation to pre apprenticeships or their equivalent, they need to align better with VCE and VCAL and with industry standards as a formal pathway to an occupation or career.

Pre apprenticeships need also to be a fully funded option for young people disengaged from mainstream school and age 15 and over.

An option would be the introduction of VET earlier in schools (for example as taster programs at Year Seven, Eight and Nine levels) where students gain credit for their experiences and participation

Students should lose nothing by participating in low level qualifications. There should be no disincentives in terms of impact on employer incentives etc.

Many students have become locked into negative patterns of behaviour and personal expectations by Year Ten and find it difficult to see and experience alternative opportunities (indicating that it can be too late to offer them VET pathways)

Alternative education pathways with accreditation and articulation need to be provided as legitimate outcomes for young people (as opposed to being listed as early school leavers for the purposes of recording outcomes from schools)

Individual student identifiers should enable schools to track outcomes of early school leavers who enter apprenticeships and traineeships enabling validation of education and individual school outcomes

TAFE colleges should develop more multi-trade VET programs which allow students at year 10 or even year 9 to experience a number of trades before embarking on an apprenticeship.

VETiS programs have been de-vocationalized to fit them into the VCE, with written exams and other written tasks which have destroyed the best qualities of the programs which used to be very practical and have become quite theoretical.

Systems that assist students to move effectively between courses, institutions and sectors (Pages 26-29)

Credit transfer and the credit matrix need to be better understood by teachers and used to support the pathways of young people in Cert 1 and Cert 11 programs and part programs who aspire to VCAL, VETiS and VCE or an equivalent pathway in TAFE.

I like Swinburne's idea of an opt-out system. Students automatically progress to the next level unless they indicate they do not wish to proceed.

The barriers to credit transfer identified relate to systemic problems where education and vocational education intersect. These problems need to be sorted out at a system level making negotiation at an individual student level possible.

There appears to be sufficient evidence to indicate that the ENTER score (now Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) as the single indicator of success is not the best predictor of successful tertiary outcomes. It is a convenient way, however, of determining who gets into what course and it provides a measure by which Universities can rank and promote themselves.

ENTER scores for courses in occupationally defined qualifications, for example Nursing and Education, demonstrate this well. A student with an ENTER of 55 gains the same base qualification

as a student with an ENTER of 75. On successful completion, both are eligible to be registered and employed in the same system and at the same entry level salary.

In FMP region, Monash University is the local university. It also has among the highest ENTER scores for courses including occupational qualifications. At the same time, access to universities with lower ENTER scores may require young people to relocate.

Significant incentives need to be in place for universities who provide outreach, distance and co-located services to support young people in rural, regional and Interface Council areas and for the schools who attract these services for their students.

ATAR furthers the divide between the haves and the have nots.

ATAR scores are still going to be the main method of selection for Tertiary education which again will disadvantage those lower achieving students.

Schools again need to integrate with business/industry to ensure greater, achievable opportunities for all students are presented.

Articulation within the VET Sector and from VET to Higher Education (Pages 31-33)

Students in VET sector require additional support with particular skills to reach performance standards expected of students in the university sector and this support should be built into courses.

Provision of higher education in TAFE will need to be expanded if TAFE/University pathways are not in place and not appropriate for the local areas

Students in rural, regional and interface Council areas need further consideration and incentives to apply for tertiary education.

Experience demonstrates that VET students have to face a range of barriers/challenges to go further into higher education eg: degree qualifications (TAFE or University).

Many students try to enter as mature aged students but are likely to drop out as they are ill-prepared for the study requirements and the academic rigour.

Young people in Interface Council areas such as Mornington Peninsula face the same barriers as young people in Regional Victoria. For example, Ballarat and Bendigo are better serviced with public transport and can have better access to Metropolitan Melbourne than towns like Mornington or Rosebud. Travel is a perceived barrier because it is not just about distance but also about cost, time and multiple modes of transport required.

Opportunities for Young People to Re-engage with Education and Training (Pages 34-37)

Flexible learning options need to be provided regionally for young people who are not suited to mainstream schooling. These programs need to be securely funded, rigorous in terms of their teaching and learning and part of the educational provision for the region. Currently, they are ad hoc and because the systemic issues between Education and the VET sector around parity of provision and credit transfer have not been resolved, they may operate in isolation from mainstream

education depending on the program, the organisation responsible for delivering it, the funding source and the required outcomes.

Community VCAL programs support young people who have disengaged at Year 10 and in some cases, Year 9 level. The review of Community VCAL and the partnerships with host schools go some way to assuring improved quality provision. However, these programs are based on a program design for young people in senior years of education. Programs to support the re engagement of young people, at the equivalent of Year 8 and Year 9 levels, and in some cases lower levels, need to be considered. As well, changes to the eligibility criteria for young people seeking access to TAFE places under the Victorian Training guarantee will severely limit the options for 15 year olds seeking to re-engage through entry into the VET system

Youth Connections is a service in FMP which is heavily weighted to severely disengaged young people and which is unable to deliver the required level of services to at risk young people in schools. Youth Connections works on a central referral model which relies on local service providers to provide outcomes for young people. Where local services do not exist or are oversubscribed, Youth Connections will struggle to find successful outcomes.

As well as support for young people at risk of leaving school, youth mentoring and a range of Local Government facilitated youth services funded under previous arrangements, are not necessarily supported under the current Youth Connections contract. The contraction or loss of these services is of great community concern as these services were built on community consultation and goodwill over a long period of time.

Career On Track, which is running in Frankston City was developed to provide career advice but not necessarily to provide the level of case management required by young people at risk of early school leaving. Among other considerations, the location of the service and the skills sets of staff of Career On Track need to be conducive to developing case management of young people who are linked to schools.

Both Youth Connections and Career On Track are limited services in that they rely heavily on other under-resourced community services.

In reviewing and reshaping the service, it will be important to look at a model which has the flexibility to meet local needs without simply shifting the burden to already stretched services.

It should have local governance in place to ensure its accountability back to the community on whose behalf it manages the funding. This would also increase its flexibility to adapt and change in response to local needs and to broker partnerships based on goodwill as well as commercial arrangements.

It would also ensure that funding for outcomes for young people is perceived as having benefits for a community rather than an organisation.

Youth Connections was signed, sealed and delivered to the community as a package. It will be trial and error whether it is the right package for this area and it faces the real prospect of being changed again in two years even if it is the right package.

Career On Track happened in a similar way.

We would hope that in reviewing Youth Connections and Career on Track and moving responsibility to the State, there will be significant and broad consultation with us around what is best for our community, what is a better long term model and how we go about embedding youth transitions into the local thinking of education, training and community as a community expectation.

Disengagement from school in FMP is being addressed by the provision of support to students through programs like Youth Connection, and local programs like Express and BOOST. However alternative education options from mainstream schooling are very limited, ad hoc, demand driven and do not address those issues that students face even at Primary school levels.

The range of options for young people aged 13 – 15 years old and disconnecting from school is inadequate. Options that young people find attractive and that are educationally based need to be available and these need to form part of the young person's Individual Learning Plan.

Students are promoted into secondary schooling often without adequate literacy and numeracy skills and are seriously disadvantaged before they even commence.

In the words of the Southern Youth Commitment: Young People. Our Future. Worth whatever it takes.

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