

# Response to the discussion Paper on Youth Transitions Systems: “Stronger Futures for all Young Victorians”.

On behalf of the staff of Heywood and District Secondary College I present our comments to the committee.

**School Background statement:** Heywood and District Secondary College provides educational opportunity to an isolated rural community of over 6,000 people centred around the South Western Victorian town of Heywood (population 1300). The school has a Koori student population of some 10% and has strong links with Windamara Cooperative. Of the school population of 186 students, 60% travel in from the outlying district by bus.

The size of the school ensures that each student is seen as unique. The school's aim is to encourage the development of students to their full potential as whole persons; to prepare them to become responsible members of the community and to ready them for appropriate and fulfilling work, or for further education. The school encourages values of individual dignity, tolerance and respect, originality, initiative, independence and honesty amongst students. To make the school a positive and enjoyable experience where students can grow, we seek to provide a variety of activities that allow individual students to experience a feeling of personal success. The College fosters self discipline in students with the ultimate goal that students take responsibility for their actions. The school also places a high value on personal caring as a characteristic of its staff, and seeks to maximize the involvement of parents within the life of the school.

Heywood and District Secondary College prides itself as a very caring and safe environment where its students can grow and mature. Young open minds enter Heywood and graduate six years later as articulate, confident and focussed young women and men.

At Heywood, we believe that every student can learn and each student is encouraged and supported to achieve his or her personal best. Our staff professional development program ensures there is a genuine commitment to continually improve the standard of teaching and learning in all areas of the curriculum. Teaching staff are complemented by a highly trained support team of aides and technicians.

Heywood and District Secondary College staff understand the need to build an educational community through quality relationships with students and parents and have the growth and development of each individual as its major focus.

## Strengths of Youth Transitions at HDSC

- An established Pathways team who work collaboratively and between them have an extensive set of skills and knowledge with which to provide high levels of support to all Post Compulsory (17 years and older) students.
- Curriculum offerings including VCE, VCAL, VET (both in school and TAFE delivery), acceleration into selected VCE subjects for individual Year 10 students.
- Study camp for Year 12 VCE; Leadership camp for VCAL; Careers camp to Melbourne for Year 11 students.
- Above state benchmark for PC employment destination data.
- Comprehensive range of subject choice, given size of school.
- Strong and established employer network, leading to ongoing work experience and structured workplace learning opportunities.
- Individual counselling and guidance for all Year 12 students and their parents.
- Access to Trade Training Centre courses.
- Individualised and close monitoring of MIP's by Careers Counsellor, pre and post compulsory.
- Strong liaison with Youth Connections for at risk students.
- Provision of careers advice, including school visits by local employment agencies and universities/TAFE.

## **Challenges for HDSC in provision of Youth Transitions**

- The ability to provide extensive information, site visits and hands-on experiences so that students are able to make informed transition choices is severely impacted by distances from larger centres.
- Limited employer list and range due to size of town, exacerbated if strong student interest in some industry areas.
- Transport to bigger centres in order to access employers.
- Access to opportunities in areas such as Police Force, community and other services, and the media sector are extremely limited.
- Travel costs involved in visiting some industries, employers, worksites, tertiary educational and/or training providers.
- Technology limitations for alternative course access.

## **Responses to individual questions posed within the discussion paper**

### **Strengthening literacy and numeracy in the post-compulsory years:**

*What form should the proposed literacy and numeracy standards take?* There needs to be more clarification of what these standards will encompass. Who will develop them (National/state)? Will they be a definitive list to be accomplished by the end of VCE/VCAL? Will they be assessed by a NAPLAN type test/adaptive type tests/teacher judgements?

*In what other ways can the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills be strengthened in the post-compulsory years?* There would need to be a prescribed curriculum. For those most at risk students there would need to be funding provided to schools (or clusters of schools) for literacy and numeracy tutors.

### **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?* This certainly forms a good foundation, but it must be reinforced by work experience and structured workplace learning placements. Regular updating and close management of such plans is also imperative. A careers curriculum could be introduced at Years 7-9 in order to assist with career planning.

*What other actions should be taken to ensure that sound career development services are available to all young Victorians?* There must be strong links and partnerships between schools and training institutions, employment agencies, local employers, businesses and industry bodies, as well as local government, chambers of commerce and LLEN's. In addition those students most at risk and Koorie's must be supported by effective liaison between schools and Koori Engagement Support Officer's, Youth Connection Workers, and other local support personnel and agencies.

*How can business/industry be more involved in assisting students' career choices?* Through provision of work experience, structured workplace learning and school based apprenticeship positions. Industries and businesses must also be actively involved in LLEN's, so that skill requirements can be fed back to schools. Career information and training taster days must be actively supported by tertiary training organisations, employment agencies, businesses, industry and local government. Provision of opportunities to visit industries and guest speakers coming into the school would also assist.

### **Arrangements that support and encourage young people to complete qualifications:**

*What would further strengthen the delivery partnerships between government and non-government schools and VET providers?* Funding from Governments to replace or update existing facilities (in schools) so that they are compliant with the facilities required to deliver accredited VET courses eg:

hospitality, building and construction and automotive. Logistic support for outlying country schools (such as Heywood and District Secondary College) so that students can access provision from other schools. Flexible delivery times from VET providers that do not add to existing timetable constraints that exist in schools, this may include the provision of courses during the evening.

*What additional actions should Government take to support young people to complete initial qualifications in the VET sector?* Funded provision of extensive TAFE taster programs to ensure that students make informed choice about VET courses. Increased support in terms of provision of infrastructure and personnel training for appropriate school based VET courses.

*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?* Is this question suggesting that there should be separate institutions to deliver academic and VET programs? Will TTC's be expected to provide the VET programs not provided by TAFE, and also remove role of VET in schools? We believe that schools are best placed to determine the needs of their cohort and how these can best be attained, thus the model of VCE and VCAL, together with school based and TAFE provided VET programs works best. It is vital that there are "real" jobs at the end of this vocational qualification period, and that there are also opportunities for work experience and structured workplace learning during the qualification period.

*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?* Maybe there could be a voucher system for further study or a training/study payment on completion of Year 12 or equivalent qualification. However the long term incentives would need to be "real" jobs, study positions at student designated institutions, traineeships, and/or apprenticeships at the end of the successful qualification attainment.

*What other strategies could be introduced to lift qualification completion rates for young people in the schools and VET sectors?* Celebrations of success, including publicity in the local community.

*How can businesses and industry be involved in increasing completion rates-especially for apprenticeships?* Through the provision of guest speakers in schools, site visits and taster days, work experience and structured workplace learning places where close mentoring fosters relationships between students and employers. They should also be actively involved in LLEN's. Local government must also become more involved in the provision of training places and/or pathways for tertiary trained students.

### **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?* Through development of career pathways and the building of relationships with students to ensure that individual needs are met, these may be social and emotional as well as learning needs. Effective LLEN's, with strong involvement by local business and industry as well as local government. More funding in schools would enhance the time that could be spent on coordinating and carrying out such tasks as gaining access to appropriate careers information, organisations and personnel, organising site visits and guest speakers. As well as time to more effectively organise and conduct work experience and structured workplace learning site visits.

*What other steps are required to assist schools' connection to the world of work?* Time to seek out, access and develop relationships with employers and industries is vital, and especially so in rural areas where this may involve travel to a larger centre to access a range of careers. Hands-on experiences, including site visits and taster days are vital as students sometimes don't really understand what is required in certain occupations or even what is available.

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

that are more frequent and involve minimal travel. Industry and business visits and taster days to give students an idea of the range of careers/jobs available. Information sessions and taster days at tertiary institutions. Tertiary institutions could provide places for acceleration of more capable secondary students into appropriate subjects, these could be accessed on-line, with maybe on campus attendance during school holidays.

### **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?* Yes, and other areas might include agriculture, financial management and computer science.

*How can governments ensure that reforms to the VET and higher education sector address both skill needs and student demand for particular qualifications?* Use LLEN, local government and local industry bodies to determine what the local need and demands are.

*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?* By mandating that a number of places are made available to those in rural and regional areas and that they have a mix of on-line and residential contact time. There could also be the provision of a number of accelerated places for secondary school students to study certain subjects that would form part of RPL that could be credited towards tertiary qualifications. Just as pre-apprenticeships can articulate into apprenticeships, these studies could be a pre-certificate or pre-degree. Maybe secondary colleges in rural and regional areas could be auspiced to deliver a Year 13 on-line which would be career focussed.

*What other actions should be contemplated by institutions and government?* Some students need hands-on "real" work experiences before and during their VET/higher education studies, this gives meaning to their learning, and for some students it is also the way they learn. Different learning styles need to be accommodated, not just focussed on those that are aural or visual learners. There is also a need to continually educate parents and society at large about the need for qualification attainment and the pathways of articulation. In addition government and institutions must be involved in providing funding and setting accountabilities in terms of outcomes of partnerships between tertiary institutions, TAFE's and TTC's, LLEN's, schools, employer and industry organisations as well as local government and employment agencies. Government needs to set 5 year goals in this area and provide funding appropriately.

### **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?* Through the development of strong partnerships with schools.

*What services should Youth Connections service providers use to establish effective referral and working arrangements?* Centrelink, DHS, Mental Health Services.

*Should LLEN's be provided more flexibility to facilitate and broker service provision to young people 20 and over, in line with the flexibility in Youth Connections service provision? Will this lead to over-servicing?*

*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.)* Yes, but there needs to be "real" jobs at the end of gaining qualifications. Other factors such as intergenerational poverty, mental health and a range of social and emotional issues as well as adequate housing and income support while studying, also need to be addressed.