



**Independent
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Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
GPO Box 4367
MELBOURNE VIC 3001

Via email: stronger.futures@edumail.vic.gov.au

Re: Stronger futures for all young Victorians

Dear Sir/Madam

Independent Schools Victoria welcomes the opportunity to contribute towards the State Government's *Stronger futures for all young Victorians* feedback process on this important discussion paper on the youth transitions system.

Established in 1949, Independent Schools Victoria represents, promotes the interests of, and provides services to Independent schools in Victoria. Today, Independent Schools Victoria assists 222 Member schools, educating more than 127,000 students. More than 99 per cent of all students enrolled in the Independent sector attend an Independent Schools Victoria Member School.

Independent Schools Victoria Member Schools are diverse in character, serving a range of different communities. Member Schools may provide religious or values-based education to students, or promote education philosophies or different interpretations of mainstream education.

Currently, 110 Independent schools provide 6499 student Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) enrolments (as per Enrolment 4), and 856 enrolments in the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). With such active participation from the Independent sector, Independent Schools Victoria believes that it can make a valuable contribution to the Victorian Government's youth transitions agenda.

Independent Schools Victoria has welcomed the efforts of the Federal Government in providing national guidance on the youth transitions issue. The *National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions* is aimed at increasing completion rates at the Year 12 level or promoting the advancement to higher qualifications; getting more people engaged in education and training; and, providing young people with the skills required to participate in the labour market.

The Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment Communiqué of 28 April 2010 has also shown that Minister's have agreed to a vision for Australia's current and future workforce needs which must be met through increased participation, educational attainment, skills development and skills use to achieve greater productivity, which Independent Schools Victoria believes neatly ties into the ideas that the Victorian

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development seeks to achieve with this discussion paper.

VETiS is an effective way for students in the Independent education sector to test their career options. However, due to funding limitations, students in the Independent sector have limited access to VETiS, and may be disadvantaged in relation to contributions to the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank, transition pathways and career choices.

Careers Advice

The seamlessness of the transition system that the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development seeks in the discussion paper is available in only a limited way to students in Independent schools.

Not all students seek an education that would be deemed as 'mainstream'. There are some Independent schools that already cater for students who are not suited to the usual education pathways. These programs are not supported by the Department, save the funding obligation that the government has to students.

This lack of support to the Independent education sector is heightened when taking into account those schools that engage in the VETiS and VCAL programs.

Access to careers advice for all students is critical. Whilst larger Independent schools may be better able to diversify resources and support to offer specialised services such as careers education, smaller schools, regional schools, rural schools and geographically isolated schools are less able to do so, and contact with any required specialised staff is limited.

Teacher Qualifications

The lack of qualified VETiS teachers in Independent schools in certain areas has arisen through two mutually reinforcing issues: the cost of teachers attaining dual qualifications and access to both professional learning time and release to maintain industry currency.

To be suitably qualified to instruct a VETiS subject, teachers are required to have qualifications entitling them to registration with Victorian Institute of Teaching plus a qualification in vocational training. Independent schools offering VETiS are required to cover the costs for supporting a teacher to achieve a vocational qualification, and offer support to ensure that a teacher could maintain both the currency in these qualifications including industry currency.

Should policymakers determine to address this issue, there remains another, more difficult obstacle to surmount, namely the prejudice of industry and industry suppliers as to the validity of VETiS qualifications. There have been reports from schools that students have been deemed by industry of not being industry ready. A commitment from government to adequately acknowledge and support industry release would undoubtedly put industry at ease.

Equipment Requirements

Independent Schools Victoria acknowledges that the Independent sector must meet its own targets, including the provision of Trade Training Centres with Federal government funding.

That said, unlike the government sector, the high infrastructure costs for some programs outside the Trade Training Centres, are required to be met by Independent schools themselves. As examples

- For schools offering a building qualification, the school would be required to provide the necessary equipment and site locations.
- For schools offering hospitality qualifications, access to equipment, including commercial kitchen space is necessary.

There are also costs to schools who might find it difficult to maintain status as a Registered Training Organisation. Many Independent schools have chosen another organisation, like Independent Schools Victoria, to auspice the training components of their curricula. This has become more common with changes to the Australian Quality Teaching Framework and an increasingly hostile regulatory environment, especially in areas with limited provider options

Training Costs

Despite representing 12 per cent level of the market, Independent schools receive minimal direct and financial support for the work they do with vocational training. It would not be untrue to say that the Victorian Government is guilty of not funding the Independent education sector. As it stands, the Victorian Department of Education distributes Commonwealth monies to Independent Schools Victoria, after deducting an administrative fee.

In those Independent schools which are unable to provide a student with a VETiS subject, local TAFEs and other training providers are often engaged to facilitate the learning need of that individual student. Whereas, in the government sector, any costs incurred in a similar arrangement would be met by the Victorian government. Students in the Independent education sector are required to pay the full amount for the subject in a market that has variable charges.

Conclusion

Vocational education and training is clearly an important pathway for young people, and could benefit those students who might be categorised as being in the 'at risk' group, and/or who are at risk of multiple or prolonged periods of unemployment in their working lives. Despite the adverse impact of low government funding levels, the Independent education sector continues to enrich the lives of students by providing access to these programs.

It is vital that Victorian policymakers recognise this contribution, and work to address the funding shortfall for students.

Should the Department require any further commentary on the Independent Schools Victoria submission to the feedback process, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Best wishes



Michelle Green
Chief Executive