

15 June 2010

The Hon. Bronwyn Pike, MP  
The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development  
Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development  
Per email: [stronger.futures@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:stronger.futures@edumail.vic.gov.au)

Dear Minister Pike,

**Jobs Australia submission on the Discussion Paper – *Stronger futures for all young Victorians: The youth transition system***

Jobs Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on how young people can be better supported to continue onto further education and training and to make a successful transition to working life through this submission.

Jobs Australia is the peak body for over 270 nonprofit providers of employment and related services. Of these, more than one hundred deliver services specifically to young people, or offer services to young people alongside other services. Additionally, the Australian Training Network (ATN), which is a service provided by Jobs Australia, assists members who wish to deliver nationally accredited training. A key focus for ATN is to provide ongoing advice and support to members in order to assist them to maintain training delivery to unemployed and disadvantaged people, many of whom are between the ages of 15-24 years. We have consulted widely with our members delivering youth services regarding how we can best support young people into study, training and employment. We have additionally consulted with our members on issues of best practice, areas of difficulty and barriers preventing successful articulation from school to training and eventually employment. These discussions inform our responses to the Discussion Paper themes.

It is useful to consider that while under the current system the attainment of Year 12 among 20 - 24 year olds has generally increased over the past decade, there are still many young people of this age who do not have this basic qualification. Additionally, 2006 data indicates that there is some way to go in improving the rates of attendance of young people in either TAFE or university (ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006). This is concerning because it is clear that higher levels of education equal greater opportunities in the workforce, especially during an economic downturn.

It is therefore clear that re-engaging young people and improving articulation rates between education and/or training remains a high priority, especially where the potential

for the creation of a new generation of long-term unemployed people looms large on the heels of the global financial crisis.

We would be happy to discuss any of these issues further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Thompson', with a small dot at the end.

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## **Background:**

Jobs Australia recognises the significant work the Victorian Government has undertaken in the area of youth training and employment support. The National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions provides a comprehensive response to the problem of youth disengagement and unemployment, and a number of positive strategies, programs and services are being delivered in support of this. The On Track survey is one such initiative that enables tracking of young people's pathways from school to education, training and employment. This has great potential for understanding how articulation processes are working.

With a range of support services in place, including Trade Training Centres in Schools, VCAL, Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs), Youth Transition Support Initiatives, LLENs and Regional Youth Commitments, the Government has ensured that a number of resources are available and in place to service young people.

However Jobs Australia argues that the cohesion and integration between these services that is required to enhance and improve service delivery is the next challenge. There are clearly 'gaps' in the system and within the services whereby some young people are not accessing the necessary and appropriate support for their individual needs. It is therefore critical to identify these blockages or gaps and work towards providing a response to ensure that no young person is left without a pathway forward.

## **Discussion Questions:**

### **Encouraging lifelong learning: literacy and numeracy attainment**

- *What form should the proposed literacy and numeracy standards take?*
- *In what other ways can the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills be strengthened in the post-compulsory years?*

Jobs Australia believes that the acquisition of literacy and numeracy should be a lifelong pursuit. Compulsory achievement of increasing levels of competency should be attained, ideally throughout all periods of schooling, training or study. To achieve this, Jobs Australia recognises that a holistic approach will be required.

One critical element would include incorporating explicit LLN teaching within all levels of education training and study, starting as early as the primary school years, up until 24 years of age. This should additionally be integrated into all areas of learning at school, eg. English, History, Woodwork, Physical Education. Simultaneously, there would be an explicit and defined core element of LLN teaching to assist individual students to focus directly on personal improvement at individualised rates of learning (the focus here would be on *rates* of learning rather than specific benchmarks during the learning phase, however ultimate benchmarks for levels of LLN comprehension must be encouraged to enable full participation in work and social life). Clearly the level of LLN support required in schools might vary between locations throughout Victoria.

There will be some students whose LLN competency will remain below any defined benchmarks. However this does not mean that they should be excluded from learning pathways. Indeed for those who are vocationally able for example, continued LLN support and training should be encouraged and offered in flexible and personalised learning pathways suitable to their learning rates and abilities.

For this to occur, there is an urgent need for targeted and standardised training for all teachers/trainers to enable a comprehensive and transferable level of competency among students in a range of learning institutions. Alongside this, greater focus should be placed on developing clear and sustainable benchmarks for levels of LLN achievement

that are acknowledged and recognised as core standards of achievement among all training and educational institutions.

Additionally, greater support and training for teachers is required in the assessment of LLN needs and administration of LLN programs throughout the learning periods. Employer support is critical in this, especially for vocational placements or beginning workers, such that LLN programs can be continued either in-house or externally in an appropriate setting during early work, training or apprenticeship programs until the age of 24 years. To this end, all training for Certificates I-IV should include a LLN component as a finite core subject. This has the additional bonus of encouraging young people to become lifelong learners, rather than focusing solely on employment outcomes in the early years.

### **Supporting future planning and providing guidance for young people**

- *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?*

Jobs Australia strongly agrees with the need for young people to develop a pathway to help them move forward towards eventual employment. However we would argue that the term 'career pathway' is too prescriptive and limiting for young people who are unlikely to have the experience and knowledge to articulate a definitive career path. Rather, students should have a *learning pathway document* that incorporates points of flexibility and options as they begin to explore areas of interest during educational and training experiences. This document would be fully supported by a MIPs mentor or other school-based mentor in the early years of schooling, to encourage students to explore a vast array of future options in all sectors of education and training. Again the focus should be on life-long learning and exposure to options instead of making definitive choices in the initial stages.

This is not to say that students should not learn to take responsibility for their choices and decisions, but that 'life management' should be a skill taught to students throughout their schooling such that they can be supported through the process of shaping their futures.

Jobs Australia argues that engagement in a learning pathway document should be happening earlier than is currently the case. Many schools employ career counsellors who predominantly work with Year 11 & 12 students. However if a student begins to disengage with the education process earlier between Years 7 and 10, they may not have the systems in place to provide immediate support and encouragement towards re-engagement.

Throughout this process, the inclusion of parental or familial support is critical. Ideally, parents, family or significant others would be involved in assisting young people in negotiating their future pathways and have access to the information required to assist young people to make choices. Family reconciliation or mediation may be required for this to occur, and Jobs Australia believes this should be part of the non-vocational or pre-employment work that needs to be undertaken for some young people. Further, in developing a fully holistic approach, consideration should be given to issues such as housing stability, health, transport, paid part-time work, drug and alcohol counselling, psychological counselling, and any other support required to stabilise the young person such that they can focus on achieving the goals they set out in their learning pathway document.

The learning pathway document should be reassessed regularly to enable the young person to re-evaluate their course and progression towards specified outcomes. Again

the focus should be on lifelong learning and progression, rather than a definitive result. Career mentors, employer, community and family support would be sought throughout these stages.

### **How can business and industry assist?**

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

Jobs Australia believes that stronger partnerships and collaboration are necessary between business/industry and training/educational sectors in order to promote genuine stakeholder engagement in the skilling of young people. This is currently reflected in the VET sector that plays a significant role between matching skills employers need and those offered by workers.

The development of stronger partnerships can be enabled through support and encouragement for vocational/industry placements for trainees or school-aged students, regular visits by business and industry to schools or training sites, road shows and showcasing at student/young people forums.

Importantly, there needs to be greater focus placed on VET to increase the exposure and status of this pathway. The low uptake of TAFE related courses as defined in the discussion paper indicates that not enough is being done to promote VET, and there is clearly a place for industry to step up and improve the perception, understanding and potential of a VET pathway. This might involve business or industry collaborating with schools and universities for example, where students can be made aware of alternative educational and training options during their study years, especially where they might be becoming disengaged with their current pathway.

Incentives for trainees might include job guarantees (up to 3 months, government subsidised) while businesses and industry would receive government financial incentives for providing jobs for exiting trainees. Additionally, support and assistance for both beginner apprentice and employer would be in place to foster sustainable relationships and maintain career trajectories. Finally cost reoccurs as a critical issue for apprentices. The low wages provide a disincentive to young people who are often struggling to pay for training and living expenses simultaneously.

Further incentives for businesses and industries could be provided to encourage engagement with pre-apprenticeship graduates. This would increase the resources available to young people, especially if they were accompanied by a guaranteed job or relevant work experience.

The advantages for businesses/industry include access to skilled-up/work-ready employees with a keen interest in the sector, and potentially financial incentives from the government. Concurrently it is also critical that business and industry maintain strong links with teaching staff at educational institutions in order to promote relevant and up-to-date industry knowledge to inform and advise students on a regular basis.

Jobs Australia notes and applauds the 2010 Federal Budget response to increase funding for projects that increase pre-apprenticeship training (by \$20M) over the next 18 mths. Another \$10.3M has also been allocated to mentoring services to support apprentices to the end of their apprenticeship and into sustainable jobs.

### **Assisting completion**

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

Jobs Australia recognises that most young people understand that education and training is the key to eventual employment. Additionally, most young people would prefer to be working than not. However assisting completion and articulation for young people firstly requires greater cohesiveness among all sectors and services.

Jobs Australia believes that greater collaboration and information sharing is necessary if young people are to experience a transparent and open articulation between school, study and training. Available options and pathways should be clearly and consistently related to all young people such that they can make informed choices about how to move forward at all points along their learning journey. This requires that teachers are up-to-date with industry knowledge and that students receive timely and accurate information about articulation processes. Thus collaboration between schools and training or higher education institutions should be regular and of a consistent nature to ensure transferability among institutions. Some service providers have indicated that their forays into partnerships are often not reciprocated, thus greater efforts are needed towards developing strong inter-sector partnerships.

In practical terms, there are a number of barriers young people face during articulation and completion phases. These include:

- Being motivated to return to study after recently leaving school (ensuring compliance with the Federal Government's early school leavers' policy which emphasises the need to undertake training [earn or learn] is already proving to be a significant issue),
- Coming up against excessive administrative requirements which can be alienating and discouraging for inexperienced young people seeking training pathways,
- Confusing and inconsistent information about articulation and completion processes,
- Cost of training and/or study, and
- Non-vocational issues including homelessness, drugs and alcohol issues, family estrangement, etc.

To assist completion in schools, Jobs Australia strongly endorses the MIPs model in schools, and calls for more widespread mentoring and support for school-age students. Building a rapport with students is a critical feature of successful mentoring and can have considerable benefits where trust and support is reciprocated. There is a need to firstly assist the development of transferable skills along a learning continuum that opens up pathways to students. This encourages students to develop the skills they need to make informed choices and to meet the challenges they will experience throughout their learning journey. With the right supports in place, completion and articulation rates would be significantly improved.

Many of these barriers can be partly addressed by providing greater mentoring and support for young people in training or pre- training through fully informed and supportive mentors. There is also a need to promote flexibility and transparency around credit arrangements between institutions to enable a unified and consistent system for students to negotiate. Further, Jobs Australia calls for fee subsidies for those who are highly financially disadvantaged in order to remove the barrier of cost.

Additional support for completion is also required in the work experience space. Work experience can open an array of options for young people to explore; enabling greater options for training that are more likely to be sustainable. However the implementation of work experience needs to be successful for both the employer and the student. It should be valuable in terms of real experience and seen to be beneficial by both parties. Issues around incentives arise here, especially for employers.

Jobs Australia believes that flexibility is a key element for working with young people throughout their schooling, training and eventual employment. For example, mid-year intakes or rolling enrolments enables student to engage in training and education sooner than is currently the case where young people might have to wait up to six months for a course to start. During this time they are at risk of disengaging from their learning pathways, and this creates a gap through which young people may fall if they are not adequately supported.

Despite this, there will still be some gaps and waiting times for young people before courses commence, and during this time a variety of short courses would be appropriate. These might include:

- Industry placements (workplace experience)
- Work readiness courses
- Prepare to study courses
- Transition and engagement courses, or
- Any of the non-training component activities suggested by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for those who receive Youth Allowance (other)(eg. Work for the Dole, National Green Jobs Corps, etc).

It is additionally important to avoid prescriptive course enrolments, especially in situations where young people are not ready for the intended course of study or training. For example, some over 20 years are pushed into progressive training (up to Certificate III & IV) before they are ready, and this is a recipe for disengagement where the young person is not academically or socially ready.

Alternate learning pathways are additionally important in encouraging and supporting young people through articulation and completion. For example ACE providers offer alternative VET opportunities to disadvantaged youth who would otherwise disengage from learning. However these alternative learning pathways should be geographically sensitive, and consider issues such as transport availability, cost and support mechanisms.

All training pathways should have work ready themes integrated throughout; such that the young person is wholly able to participate in a working environment once they have completed their training. Jobs Australia recognises that employability skills are critical, and that theory and practice should be strongly focused on real life application into the work setting.

### **Youth Connections**

- *How can Youth Connections be implemented in Victoria to most effectively re-engage young people with education and training?*
- *What services should Youth Connection providers use to establish effective referral and working arrangements?*

Jobs Australia recognises the importance of the Youth Connections program in addressing the needs of disengaged youth. However as a reactive program rather than a preventative one, there remains a gap in services for school-based young people who are in the process of disengaging at an earlier age, even in the late primary school years. As Youth Connections is not delivered in schools, there is an additional need for a specifically school-based program, to support and mentor young students at risk of disengaging as described earlier. Additionally, comprehensive teacher training is required in the identification of at-risk young people, and the subsequent referral to and support within appropriate services.

Despite this gap in the school system, it is clear that Youth Connections provides a number of effective services to assist disengaged young people. Jobs Australia applauds the focus on addressing non-vocational barriers before young people are placed into a training, education and work pathway. Emphasis should be placed on pre-employment and pre-vocational support such that the young person is more able to meet the challenges of employment searching.

A significant part of this requires strong relational ties between young people and their caseworkers. This includes transparency, continuity of service, care and empathy. Many of our members have suggested that a greater number of youth specialist workers are required who can empathise and support young people in a way that is genuine and engaging. This is critical for establishing trust and support between the two parties, resulting in more effective outcomes for the young person.

Jobs Australia members in Victoria have noted the initial success of the Youth Connections program for disengaged young people. However these members have also indicated that the funding provided to deliver this service in Victoria has been underestimated and the level of need far outstrips the number of places available. Additionally, while there are many satellite services to which Youth Connection providers can engage, there is limited networking and collaboration within many communities, which ultimately reduces the options available for caseworkers to offer to young people. Greater transparency is required within communities to enable such connections, possibly via community consultations and forums whereby specialist service providers can work together to provide the best possible options to young people seeking training and employment.

Jobs Australia June 2010