



Mission Australia's Response to DEECD
Stronger Futures for all Young Victorians
Discussion Paper on the Youth
Transitions System

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Mission Australia is an empowering and compassionate community services organisation that, for the past 150 years, has been helping to transform the lives of Australians in need. Our staff, supporters and Board are committed to eliminating disadvantage and creating a fairer Australia. We believe everyone should have the chance to enjoy a full and active life, irrespective of their personal challenges or circumstances.

In 2009 we assisted 280,386 people in need and 10,587 families. Through our programs and services, we combat homelessness, assist families and children to develop a safe, nurturing environment, support disadvantaged young people and help unemployed people find permanent work. We also recognise the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the original owners and custodians of this country.

Mission Australia has worked extensively in the youth transition space using a variety of models such as targeted and strategic case management services, innovative group based training program delivery and employment of young people through a suite of social enterprises that support and re-engage disconnected young people and transition them into more positive futures.

Question Set 1:

What forms 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?

Mission Australia supports the decision to review the effectiveness of the Victorian youth attainment and transition system. Poor performance in literacy and numeracy is a key factor leading to disengagement from education. The 2009 On-track data identifies poor academic performance as the single most important push-factor identified with early school leaving. This is one of the key areas which requires reform to help reduce disengagement.

The age range examined by this evaluation is listed as 15-24 years. Mission Australia would suggest that there is a need to broaden the range of this review to include the primary level. Mission Australia has experienced a growing number of young people that are disengaging from school at younger ages. Our case managers routinely work with young people who at age 13 have been disengaged for several years. As one part of addressing this issue we would suggest that literacy and numeracy reform needs to occur from the primary level if it is to be impactful.

Mission Australia feels strongly that we need to stop the practice of allowing students to progress from one level to the next when they don't possess the basic foundation skills to be successful at that level. Mission Australia works with many of these young people who have been allowed to progress through

several years of school to a point where they are unable to participate effectively due to their poor literacy and numeracy. When the student and their family realises their situation they consider that they have no other acceptable alternative but to withdraw. Mission Australia's Youth Connections Program connects with young people in this situation frequently. The practice of progressing students from year to year adds increasing pressure on the student to "catch up" without additional support and in many cases compounds the problem and sets students up for failure. Intervention in literacy and numeracy needs to begin at the primary level and provide a range of individual support strategies such as remedial classes, tutoring and homework support groups that are adequately resourced.

For the schools that have adopted the Students at Risk MIPS mapping tool, these students are more easily identified. Our partner schools have reported that this initiative has been successful where it is being used as intended. Without a tool to monitor early indicators of disengagement and mapping them to the range of interventions available in the area, many students "slip between the cracks".

Early identification of these students and communicating this across the primary to secondary school transition point will assist schools to monitor performance and put supports in place early. Literacy and numeracy plans are used widely but we have concern that in some cases these plans are not appropriately actioned and followed through.

Mission Australia would also support a review of the Graduate Diploma of Education to ensure that all graduates have been trained in the delivery of basic literacy and numeracy as well as a unit in student welfare and wellbeing. These areas are all currently electives in the Dip Ed. This would help increase the capacity of teachers across all studies to contribute to the literacy, numeracy and wellbeing of each of their students.

At the secondary level, a curriculum shift has occurred resulting in a move away from classic subjects and towards the provision of a more diverse range of subjects designed to engage young people. While Mission Australia supports an evolving curriculum that is responsive to the emerging, broad range of skills and capabilities needed to flourish in contemporary society, in some instances this has detracted from the development of core literacy and numeracy skills as many teachers consider this peripheral to or outside their particular unit responsibilities. A common concern expressed to us by our school partners is that in some cases educators with responsibility for delivering a subject such as Forensics are likely to be less concerned with literacy matters than the learning objectives particular to the unit in which they specialise. This is understandable given assessment of the educator's performance is based on criteria other than the literacy levels of the students.

This division of responsibility leaves too large a task for one member of the teaching team to perform alone. Embedding literacy and numeracy across all levels of the curriculum and promoting shared responsibility for the development of these foundational skills across the entire staff complement is

likely to ensure that more young people will enjoy the considerable benefits of strengthened literacy and numeracy skills.

In view of the above, Mission Australia supports the deployment of literacy and numeracy coaches to work in schools to up-skill existing staff and the establishment of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat which will help promote evidence based practice in schools.

In many areas the percentage of students for whom English is a second language is growing quickly. The 2006 census data reported that in the City of Greater Dandenong 46.5% of the population was born in a non-English speaking country and there are many other local areas with a significant proportion of the population born in non-English speaking countries. This suggests that greater emphasis needs to be placed on teaching English as a second language, particularly in these locations. Our case managers work with young people that have positive aspirations and the desire to continue on with their education, but lack the basic literacy skills to do so.

The intensive English Language Schools do an excellent job with newly arrived young people, however the time that young people spend there is in some cases insufficient to prepare many students for the mainstream. Their work needs to be followed up within schools with a separate stream of literacy classes for those for whom English is a second language.

Students who have disengaged from school due to poor performance often transition to a local ACE provider. In many cases ACE Providers do an excellent job re-engaging and supporting young people but can lack the formal training in literacy and numeracy, especially for those with special needs. This is in part related to matters such as role classification and salary structures. For example, the remuneration levels and other employment conditions for ACE Tutors are less attractive than that for classroom teachers. As a result, skilled literacy and numeracy coaches willing to work under these conditions are difficult to find and to retain in the ACE sector. A review of the funding arrangements for these Flexible Learning Options may enable ACE Providers to attract more highly qualified teachers. This would positively impact outcomes for young people.

This matter is consistent with the concern resoundingly raised in the KPMG Re-engaging our Kids study regarding the need for adequate resourcing for alternative education programs. From Mission Australia's vantage point there is clearly a need for a mechanism under which a Students Resource Package (SRP) funding can follow the student from school to alternative education provider, similar to the Innovative Community Action Network (ICAN) model that is used effectively in South Australia. ICAN also acknowledges the need for this type of arrangement to include young people from year 6 and above. South Australia leads the country in this reform and is receiving positive results. Mission Australia would support the adoption of a similar policy in Victoria.

Similarly, TAFE Trainers are often highly skilled in their vocational area but lack the literacy and numeracy teaching ability to adequately prepare young people for the workplace. It appears to be generally accepted that TAFE teachers' primary responsibility is to develop students' technical skills as required by industry, rather than literacy and numeracy. In a ten week pre-apprenticeship program there is also little scope for improvement in literacy and numeracy. Once students have exited the school system, their chance of connecting with someone trained in improving their literacy and numeracy reduces significantly. This suggests that reform and intervention is best placed at the school level.

Question Set 2:

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?

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

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

Mission Australia supports the development of a careers curriculum and targeted careers mentoring and coaching for staff in each region. We believe that these will be effective approaches for improving services within schools.

Our experience delivering transition support programs has shown that the first point of contact with careers services is generally at the year 10 level, and this exposure is often through the delivery of Managed Individual Pathways (MIPS). There is great disparity between the ways MIPS is delivered across schools, from a broad approach to large group delivery session through to individualised career plans which are living documents which are regularly updated and tracked throughout their senior years. Our experience is that one off or occasional careers guidance has little impact. Mission Australia would support the provision of a framework and curriculum that ensures that MIPS funding is used exclusively to support pathways and transitions and that it is used in an impactful way for each individual student.

If a student's first contact with careers services occurs at the year 10 level then the many young people who disengage prior to this point have received no careers information or guidance. These young people are particularly disadvantaged not only because they are early school leavers, but they often have unrealistic career expectations and views of potential pathways. Mission Australia supports the implementation of a careers program from the year 9 level.

In Mission Australia's experience, there is a strong link between a student's level of personal awareness and their ability to make informed careers decisions. Mission Australia would suggest that a careers curriculum include a personal development module which would assist students to explore their strengths, personal qualities, hobbies & interest areas, work style and lifestyle preferences. If a student has a more holistic view of themselves they are in a better position to make career decisions that will be well suited to themselves.

In Mission Australia's view, there is a clear need to review career pathway planning for early school leavers. This group can often be very difficult to engage due to poor attendance and poor relationships with school personnel. Whilst these factors present significant challenges they are a highly important group to engage with as they are the most at-risk of becoming the next generation of long-term unemployed.

Some of these young people could be assisted through the development of standardised exit procedures that ensure the young person has access to careers and welfare staff that may assist them with transition support. Mission Australia would support the implementation of a referral mechanism to services such as Youth Connections and the Youth Transition Support Initiative (YTSI) as part of this procedure. We would support schools implementing a system whereby students at the beginning of the school year give permission for their details to be passed on to the Youth Connections Provider if they stop attending school. However, we appreciate that there may be privacy implications associated with this and would welcome the engagement of all relevant experts and parties to identify an ethically sound approach to this problem which ensures that these young people have every opportunity to receive support upon leaving school.

There is a demonstrated need in the community for what is internationally referred to as a "Third Place" for young people who are not connected to their primary places of home and school. Community organisations that operate Tier 4 Flexible Learning Options Programs are an excellent example of organisations that are currently providing careers guidance to disconnected young people in this kind of space.

Another cohort that could access services in this space is Year 12 completers who are disengaged or who have dropped out of courses or not commenced further study. This is often a hidden disadvantaged group that is ineligible for funding in many transition support programs. In some cases these young people have also accumulated large debts in study costs, which they will find difficult to pay off without the increased earning potential that accompanies increased skill levels and the attainment of qualifications.

Community Careers Centres operated by Flexible Learning Options or Youth Connections Providers would be able to provide independent and impartial careers and transitions advice to disengaged young people. Provision of a Third Place is very important in the process of re-engaging marginalised members of our youth population. These services would benefit from inclusion

in Careers Networks and by having access to professional development activities through DEECD.

Mission Australia supports the notion that parental engagement is highly desirable in careers guidance. A high proportion of parents report that they want to be involved in the decision making process but do not possess the knowledge around pathways in the increasingly crowded post-compulsory transition space. Recent primary research and capacity building conducted by Mission Australia confirms the importance of engaging parents in the schooling system and ensuring that educators have sufficient levels of cultural competence to engage parents of students from non-English speaking backgrounds, for whom the education system can be confronting and difficult to understand.¹ In 2005 The Brotherhood of St Laurence completed research that found that only 20% of parents felt they had sufficient knowledge to support their child's transition from school. It also found that 80% of young people wanted assistance from their parents to make this decision. There is a continued need to build the capacity of parents to help guide young people through their transition.

Programs such as the Parents as Career Transition Support (PACTS) Program have had some success however the challenge is always scheduling these sessions at a suitable time around parents' other commitments. Mission Australia also supports DEEWR's inclusion of the Parents Talking Career Choices section of the Job Guide. For some parents this is an extremely helpful resource as it can be accessed at any time on paper or online. Parents from CALD backgrounds, however, find the English version unhelpful. This problem is further compounded when these parents come from countries that do not possess a VET, TAFE or ACE sector. This creates an increased level of uncertainty and unfamiliarity. In many cultures the university sector is the only option for post compulsory study and positions in the building trades are not remunerated at levels anywhere approaching that in Australia. An adaptation of the PACTS program has been impactful with parents from CALD backgrounds in the Eastern Metropolitan Region in helping them to understand the post compulsory transition system and how the employment market in Australia may differ substantially from that of their home country.

The Youth Connections Program works with parents wherever possible to help communicate the range of options available to a young person. Mission Australia's practitioners are finding that many parents comment that this is the first time they have been consulted about careers for their young person. Mission Australia's National Case Management Approach (NCMA) upholds the client as the expert in their own lives and actively involves them in any

¹ Refer to *Young people and the criminal justice system: New insights and promising responses* (2009): <http://www.missionaustralia.com.au/downloads/social-policy-reports/188-young-people-and-the-criminal-justice-system-new-insights-and-promising-responses>. Mission Australia will soon be releasing a toolkit which shares our learning from the development of the case management model for Pacific young people which is discussed in this publication. This includes a section concerning the capacity building which took place with secondary school teachers to support these educators to better engage with Pacific young people and their parents. It also provides detailed information about the taken for granted aspects of the Australian education system, and how this system can sometimes rub against protective factors related to a young person's cultural identity.

decision making and case planning. It also acknowledges and affirms the importance of involving other significant people in the case management process, which is particularly important where young people are concerned. Mission Australia's experience bears this out – we have experienced a much higher level of success in transition when a young person's parents/guardians are actively involved in both decision making and implementation of responses and supports.

Mission Australia suggests that the careers framework should be embedded across all studies with each individual subject area spending time exploring a range of related professions, post-compulsory study options and likely industry working conditions. Closer links with Industry will help us to close the gap between the teaching of theory in a subject area and our students understanding the practice in the profession and workplace.

Question Set 3:

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

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

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

How should schools, VET providers and system authorities use the new transparency and accountability arrangement in Victorian schools and the Victorian Student Number to improve the completion rate of year 12 or equivalent qualifications?

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

How can business and industry be involved in increasing completion rates – especially for apprenticeships?

Mission Australia works with many young people from low SES backgrounds for whom the cost of participation in VET is a significant barrier. There are very limited mechanisms for fee reductions, waivers or brokerage. Improving the capacity of programs such as Youth Connections to provide brokerage funds for young people that are unable to pay fees would be highly beneficial.

It is highly likely that the new fee structure for TAFE level programs is also acting as a disincentive for young people to participate. Diploma level

programs can now easily exceed \$2000 which places this out of the reach of many individuals and families. These costs also rise considerably when we include transport, accommodation and textbooks. It is likely that many young people will not be prepared to take on the level of debt required under the new Ministerial Direction on fees and charges and will look to lower skilled pathways. The increase in fees at this level may well provide a barrier to the completion of post-compulsory study and inhibit the COAG's Year 12 completion agenda.

It is a pre-requisite for many VET subjects at TAFE's that a student has an enrolment in a home school, effectively precluding many young people who have become disconnected from the mainstream. This policy presents a barrier to participation in one of the few avenues available for ongoing education and training for this cohort. Mission Australia recommends that this barrier be dismantled to open up access to these programs for disconnected young people. This would help improve both participation and completion rates in VET.

Mission Australia supports the specialisation of institutions in a region in cases where these specialisations are linked to real job prospects. Over the last 15 years we have observed a movement in school curriculum away from core components to a greater level of speciality to match student interest and engagement. Whilst this has had some success and we support curricula which are responsive to student needs and interests, it is important that other factors, such as industry needs and demand also inform educational provision at the post-compulsory level to ensure there is a fit between supply and demand. This is particularly critical if we are to improve the employment prospects of young jobseekers and forestall long-term unemployment. Mission Australia suggests that the continued operation of government funded training programs in regionally based skill shortage areas has a vital role to play in supporting young people to make successful transitions into the workplace..

There appears to be a level of disconnect between the range of current policies in schools. The increased level of transparency in Schools from the MySchool website, NAPLAN testing and ATAR scores provides a disincentive for schools to retain challenging and non-academic students. Results in these metrics can impact on schools' enrolment bases and future funding levels. This acts as a disincentive to retain non-academic students. Mission Australia has serious concerns that this could continue to translate into schools moving students out of studies before the senior years so that they do not affect schools' performance metrics, as they are currently defined.

At the same time schools are being asked to provide innovative and engaging curriculum and to provide flexible learning options to keep all students engaged. By engaging the less academically inclined students, schools face a contracting global budget. It is feasible that the current system will encourage schools to place undue weight on reported performance results and that this may be at the expense of engaging all learners.

Mission Australia strongly supports the need to encourage schools to provide alternative options to keep young people engaged at school and would support the introduction of new metrics concerning student wellbeing, disengagement and student satisfaction. Without this information it is foreseeable that parents without knowledge of the education sector will select schools based on their reported academic results, rather than the best-fit for their child.

The Victorian Student Number (VSN) will allow us to gather more accurate data around young people's journey through the transitions space. It will also help highlight the numbers of young people that withdraw or drop out of studies, at which key stages and from which geographical regions. The data could also allow us to track student's movement across course areas and identify common exit points.

This number could also help us to identify students as they withdraw from studies through the AVETMISS Data Upload which is completed at least monthly by RTO's and TAFE's. As referred to earlier, if it is possible to establish a mechanism for these young people to be followed up by their local Youth Connections Providers more timely support and intervention can be provided.

Accurate transition data will allow the sector to design intervention and support models that are more strategic, targeted and impactful. Whilst it may take several years to identify trends and common pathways, Mission Australia supports the implementation of the VSN and the release of results to service providers for evaluation and planning purposes. These data will also be useful for analysis purposes at a regional level.

Question Set 4:

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

What other steps are required to assist schools' connection to the world of work?

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

Mission Australia believes that transition support initiatives such as Youth Connections contribute significantly to participation rates in the VET sector. Youth Connections works with young people who have disengaged from school. Often, these young people haven't received any careers guidance as prior to their exit. These young people often have little concept of the range of training options that exist outside of their mainstream schools. This alone creates a barrier to reconnection.

Youth Connections helps to address any barriers the young person may be experiencing, builds their confidence and self-esteem and in conjunction with the client helps develop pathway to a more successful future. If the first two parts of this service are not adequately performed then the student is highly unlikely to make a transition to further education, training and employment and even less likely to be able to sustain it.

Transition support initiatives such as Youth Connections have demonstrated themselves to be successful at this task but need to be adequately resourced if they are to have the desired impact. Many Youth Connections Consortia are reaching their capacities for service delivery across the state at the six month mark of program operation. This issue of under resourcing will need to be addressed as providers know from numerous years of experience that there is a sustained peak in service demand from disengaged young people from September until the end of the year. Providers across Victoria and Nationally will not have the capacity to service these young people and have very limited alternative service options. Mission Australia is concerned that this will translate into a much larger peak in demand for services for the highly disengaged in 2011 (Type 2B).

This small but significant group experience highly turbulent times and broken transitions and it is this group that Mission Australia is particularly concerned about. Their foundations for adulthood are shaky and their capacity to actively shape their future is extremely limited. Minor interventions and extra time will have little impact on improving their outcomes. Unlike their contemporaries, they are a long way from social and economic participation and are at risk of long term exclusion. Please find the attached copy of Mission Australia's Youth Employment Continuum which draws attention to nine factors which play a critical role in the transition of this group of young people.

These young people are often unwilling to enter schools, TAFES or even attend any mainstream services that are operated from office spaces. These young people experience a range of barriers such as drug and alcohol use, mental health issues, homelessness, and have a high level of mistrust for authority. These young people are often living on the fringe of our community and require intensive case management services in order to re-engage them. Only when these primary barriers have been addressed and the client is stabilised can we begin to re-engage them with education.

Mission Australia supports the Victorian Training Guarantee for young people but young people that are highly marginalised and disengaged will require case management and transition support to be able to reconnect with these education options. It is estimated that this cohort is between 2 - 5% of the youth population and if transition programs are not resourced to this level then this will hinder our progress in the youth transition area.

Young people in regional areas face a larger number of barriers for participation in VET and Tertiary study. Mission Australia's experience delivering transition services in regional Victoria show that the high cost of

travel and accommodation acts as a major disincentive for study. Mission Australia supports the implementation of fee waivers and transport subsidies for regional young people that reflect the true cost of relocating and using public transport to attend an education activity.

Mission Australia would support the provision of transition support programs at the School, TAFE, ACE and Tertiary level which help build familiarity with the new learning environments. In the same way that primary and secondary schools should provide a transition support program for the primary to secondary transition, secondary schools should focus on building partnerships with forwards providers around the next phase of transition for our young people. There are some excellent examples of partnerships between these organisations but these need to be broadened and strengthened across the state.

Mission Australia believes that the era of demand led funding in the post compulsory area will assist partnerships to form as TAFE's and ACE providers begin to compete for learners. Teachers should explore careers and study pathways during class time from all training programs. We believe that Industry Skills Councils and Industry Training Advisory Boards have an enhanced role to play here in their partnerships with all sectors and building the capacity of our teachers and trainers to better understand professions outside of their theoretical study area.

Question Set 5:

Should efforts to improve VET to higher education articulation and credit arrangements focus on particular occupational pathways and skill priority areas, for example engineering and nursing?

How can governments ensure that reforms to the VET and higher education sector address both skill needs and student demand for particular qualifications?

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 relocate?

What other actions should be contemplated by institutions and government?

Mission Australia supports the strengthening of articulation between the VET and tertiary sectors across all pathways. Broadly, we would like to see completion of Diploma level programs qualify students for entry into Degree programs as long as the pre-requisite study areas are met. This automatic entry into higher levels of study will help drive the federal government's target of 40% of 25-44 year olds achieving a Bachelors degree or above.

We support a focus on vocational areas that address industry skill shortages, and a system that is responsive to projected skill shortages, coupled with appropriate careers advice that informs and inspires young people to embark on pathways that lead to jobs with futures.

There are a number of studies at the TAFE level which we believe could articulate with tertiary studies due to their similar study area focus. Mission Australia would recommend that a study be commissioned to explore the feasibility of some of these pathways and a guide for developing partnerships between sectors.

VET/ TAFE / ACE Study	Possible Tertiary Study Area
Apprenticeship / Trades	Engineering / Construction
VCAL / Community Services	Nursing / PCA / OT
Bookkeeping, Accounting	Commerce, Accounting
Business Admin, Business Management, HR	Business, Business Marketing
VCE / VCAL	Arts

Additionally, there is a potential career pathway that could be developed from TAFE/ACE Trainer to Teacher. These individuals already possess part of the skill set for classroom teaching and could be up-skilled to make them eligible for Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration and to teach in schools through a bridging degree program. This pathway would assist us to reduce the skill shortage in the teaching industry.

There are a number of examples of effective partnerships between the TAFE and Tertiary sectors where students complete some modules from university level study at the TAFE level. Many students in the TAFE sector have low confidence in their ability to study at the tertiary level. This obstacle can be overcome if the opportunity to sample study at that level is provided. This exposure to Tertiary level academia can build students' self-confidence and help them to aspire to study further.

Mission Australia's Catalyst Clemente Program assists mature-aged, early school leavers to reconnect with tertiary level programs. Catalyst Clemente offers free socially supported university education in the humanities delivered in a community setting for people who are experiencing significant life challenges such as overcoming homelessness, mental health or drug and alcohol issues. The program offers accredited university courses in humanities subjects such as literature, philosophy, sociology, media, journalism and art. A student who completes four courses of study will receive a university certificate which can lead to opportunities for further university education. Each student is supported by a Learning Partner, a volunteer who provides one on one support and learning assistance throughout the course of study. Many of our participants comment that they never even bothered to dream about attending university and considered it beyond the realm of possibility.

The Catalyst program has demonstrated that there are many disadvantaged members of our community who have the potential to achieve more if given the opportunity and support to build a better future for themselves. The model Mission Australia has developed for the Catalyst Clemente Program could be adapted and applied more broadly to assist the Australian Government to achieve the target of having 20% of higher education enrolments from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Mission Australia would also like to suggest that tertiary institutions interested in assisting learners to progress from the VET sector could operate Tertiary Transition Programs. These programs could be a bridging course designed to improve skill knowledge in certain areas for students who do not meet some of their entry requirements and prepare them for tertiary study.

The articulations we select must be evaluated to ensure that the requirements for these courses in terms of literacy, numeracy and other specialisations are met and that students are set up with an achievable career pathway.

The Federal and Victorian Governments could ensure that reforms in the VET and higher education sectors address skill needs areas by adjusting funding arrangements in regional skills shortage areas. The weighted training hour system applied to qualifications could be adjusted to reflect these changes. This would provide financial incentives for providers to adjust their delivery plans and could address regional skill shortages.

Students in regional and rural areas can be assisted to articulate without having to relocate through the use of new media and ICT. Open learning is widely available through many institutions. Students can access on-line learning and tutorials, conference calls, webcasting and webinars and podcasting of lectures. These technological advances allow students to access studies from rural and remote areas. Articulation can continue to be more of an issue for regional and rural students because their VET providers may not have an established relationship with Universities in the metropolitan area.

Question Set 6:

How can Youth Connections be implemented in Victoria to most effectively re-engage young people with education and training?

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

Should LLEN's be provided with flexibility to facilitate and broker service provision to young people 20 and over, in line with the flexibility of Youth Connections service provision?

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

The Youth Connections Program and its predecessor programs have provided transition support to at risk young people for many years. They have proven themselves to be effective in the re-engagement of young people and for assisting in their transitions.

The design of the new Youth Connections program which commenced in January has given the program an increased level of flexibility to design and deliver a continuum of services at a local level. Mission Australia believes this will translate into improved outcomes for those who are able to access these services.

The overall service targets for providers in each region have been significantly reduced under this new model and this program places an increased emphasis on those who have been completely disengaged from education for over three months.

The responsibility of schools in supporting the transition of their at-risk students has been affirmed concurrently with this reduction in service from Youth Connections inside the school walls. However, Mission Australia and many of our affiliated providers have not observed an increased level of support being provided to young people inside schools. Referrals from Schools to Youth Connections Providers are continuing at the same rate as they did throughout the Youth Pathways and Connections Programs. Many Youth Connections providers are reporting that they are approaching their capacity to take on these clients only 6 months into the new program. Our experience shows that the demand for this service will be far greater during the second half of the year. Mission Australia would support the provision of additional incentives for schools to fill this identified service gap and prevent students from “falling through the cracks” in our transitions system.

Mission Australia is concerned a gap in service for those students still attached to school but at high risk will translate into higher numbers of severely disengaged young people in 2011. It is far more cost effective to provide early-intervention support to those who are still in the school system than it is to re-engage those that have been disengaged from school for several months. It is also highly beneficial to the young person, their families and the community that early intervention is provided in preference to crisis intervention.

If our school partners are unable to increase their level of transition support to offset the reduction in Youth Connections service in schools then the overall transitions of young people will be adversely affected. This shifting of service delivery away from early intervention will place additional stress on an already under-resourced program. Mission Australia will work with the Youth

Connections Providers Network to collect state-wide data to quantify the level of unmet demand for Youth Connections. The network will provide this data to the Central Office for consideration in the development of the new transition support program that will replace Youth Connections between 2012 and 2014.

One of the most critical supporting roles the Central Office could provide is the implementation of an appropriate funding model that will resource transitions programs. The Education and Training Reform Act and the Youth Compact entitles all young people who are aged under 17 to a place in school. In Mission Australia's view, a system is needed that enables all young people who are not enrolled on census day to receive transition support and participate in alternative programs.

One solution might be to establish a virtual school that holds the enrolment funds of all disengaged students. This virtual school could be a holding place for the Student Resource Package (SRP) funding and also responsible for re-allocating funding when and if the student re-engages. In a similar way to the Innovative Community Action Networks (ICAN) in South Australia, the virtual school could employ youth workers, social workers and drug and alcohol workers who specialise in re-engaging young people and help them to overcome a range of barriers to participation in education. In this way a virtual school would help to improve participation and engagement and would contribute to the achievement of COAG's 2015 target of VCE completion rates.

Mission Australia strongly believes that young people who were not enrolled on census day have exactly the same right to an education as someone that was enrolled the previous day. Furthermore, these students require innovative solutions and case management which cannot be funded through their SRP if none was allocated to them. In many cases these students must wait until the following year to access innovative programs by which time disengagement can become further entrenched.

As is well documented, it is more costly to make an effective intervention at the sharp end of the disengagement scale than at its base. In many cases it is more costly than the total SRP. If the aspirations of the social inclusion agenda are to be achieved, programs that support students who experience social, emotional and behavioural issues that make participation in the mainstream more challenging must be adequately resourced in the same way that other high needs groups are resourced with targeted, additional funding. Participation in appropriate education will continue to be the primary pathway to assist people to rise above their issues and become independent and successful members of our community.

Mission Australia would support the Central Office implementing a funding model which provides sustainability for transitions and flexible learning programs for highly disengaged young people by allowing portability of funding so that the student is truly at the centre of decision-making regardless of the date on which they first attend school in that year.

Youth Connections Providers use a broad range of networks to operate their dedicated triage and referral services. These networks include the Schools, Careers Networks, LLEN's, Principals Networks, Student Wellbeing Networks, Council Youth Service Providers Networks, Centrelink, DHS and Youth Justice. Youth Connections Providers are also involved in the range of Better Youth Service Pilots that are working towards improving the coordination of youth services on a local level across Victoria. There are many lessons being learned at the local level which can be shared across the state.

Youth Connections Providers maintain relationships with a broad range of community service providers including health services, drug and alcohol services, mental health providers, counselling services and education providers. These relationships assist Youth Connections providers to provide support for at-risk young people. Referrals to a range of community providers assists Youth Connections Providers to respond holistically to the range of issues the young person may be experiencing.

Mission Australia supports the extension of the role of the LLEN's to broker a range of services for at-risk young people. We acknowledge that there is the need for a re-engagement service for those aged 20 years or above. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum estimated that the total lifetime cost of one year of early school leavers in Australia is \$2.6 Billion dollars, and 60% of this is borne by Government. When coupled with outcomes data from the Youth Pathways and Connections Programs this provides a strong economic case for providing transition support to young people.

Mission Australia suggests that this service would be better delivered by Youth Connections Providers who have the expertise in re-engaging young people and providing the range of necessary supports to maintain engagement. This kind of service could be conducted in partnership with Job Services Australia Providers and be funded from the Employment Pathways Fund (EPF). Mission Australia would be interested in working with DEECD or DIIRD in developing a suitable and sustainable pilot for this type of service delivery.

There are a range of qualifications on offer to young people in Victoria that can assist in post-compulsory transition. The Certificate I in Vocational Preparation and the Certificate I in Work Education are excellent examples of qualifications that can be delivered to young people that have disengaged from school at or below the year 10 level. These base-level certificates are important in helping to build confidence in the young persons ability to have a success with education in an alternate setting.

These programs provide a well considered range of elements including personal development, learning and work preparatory units. Mission Australia supports both of these programs as they provide a framework under which we can deliver accredited training delivery that can reconnect young people with education, training or employment.

The Certificate of General Education for Adults offers a longer period of engagement for young people and has an increased focus on literacy and numeracy. It provides a pathway to the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning. This alternative to VCE for those that are hands-on learners that are looking at entering trades or the workforce after the program concludes.

Mission Australia is satisfied with the range of qualifications on offer to engage young people that have exited the mainstream. There is sufficient flexibility in each of the curriculum documents to allow providers to customise the training for the desired target group.