

STRONGER FUTURES FOR ALL YOUNG VICTORIANS

RESPONSE TO DISCUSSION PAPER

SOUTH GIPPSLAND BASS COAST LOCAL LEARNING AND EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

Section 1: Strengthening literacy and numeracy in the post compulsory years.

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?

We know long before commencing secondary college whether a student is grasping literacy and numeracy, therefore the Implementation of literacy standards in senior years needs to align with early and middle year strategies. In the ACT and Northern Territory and in the VCAL model a student can take as long as needed to achieve the expected standards for example; 3 years to complete Year 11 and 12. A vertical curriculum allows students to enter at an appropriate level and move through according to their learning needs and interests. This approach has served talented students well allowing them to complete qualifications early and could be applied to all learners adjusting completion time to the needs of the learner. Allowing students to enter year 12 with low levels of literacy and numeracy devalues the education system and is a major barrier to creating a successful pathway through life.

However amidst this discussion is the fact that there is an established standard built from National Curriculum and VELs English Dimensions that clearly defines the standard expected in awarding Year 11 or Year 12 certificates. The embedded literacy and numeracy standards in the National Curriculum are explicit in describing achievement.

The realisation that literacy skills include the ability to write in a style appropriate to a specified audience needs to be strengthened in the curriculum. The tendency to use text talk, a relaxation of the importance of spelling and the use of colloquial language doesn't prepare students for further study or participation in the workforce. The link between spoken and written communication is realised by the learner through spelling, grammar and reading. Young people can be quite articulate but unable to express the same level of skill in their writing therefore inhibiting their ability to clearly communicate their ideas and knowledge.

Section 2: 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?

A career plan needs to be broad and link to transferability of skills and attributes. As adults and educators we have an ethical obligation to ensure that we don't subconsciously limit young people's choices by having limited perceptions of individuals in the minds of those who are supporting them. There also needs to be flexibility in the minds of young people as we are asking young people to make concrete decisions about their futures without the full realisation of what is actually possible. There needs to be stronger articulation from VCAL to VCE or from VCAL to University to prevent students from limiting their access to advanced education pathways. . The plan could concentrate on investigation of self: strengths, attributes, preferred learning styles, current skills and goals and investigation of potential pathways in the context of self awareness and aspiration.

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

A variation of what we currently consider to be careers education should form part of the curriculum from a much younger age. For younger students this of course would not be focused on identifying job choices and subject selection but on developing a broad general knowledge of careers and occupations with the aim of inspiring aspiration and belief in one's own potential.

Careers Education in most secondary schools is currently under resourced particularly in terms of staffing. It is often first to be cut in time and allocation when budgeting gets tight. If the subject were to be mandated (recommended 1.0 EFT coordinator/teacher per 400 students) within or external to specific subject areas and integrated across all year levels rather than being seen as a year ten subject the ability of students to determine who they are, where they are going and how they are going to get there would be greatly enhanced as a natural progression in life and not a school subject to either pass or fail.

Ensure that careers education is appropriately resourced in the Victorian strategy and mandated either as a subject or as a component of individual disciplines. This does not seem to be the case in the proposed national curriculum

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

A lot of energy and resource has been dedicated to this question over recent times through federal programs such as Career Advice Australia, Scientists in Schools and through local initiatives by LLENs. There are also some wonderful stand alone

projects developed through individual partnerships between schools and industry. A prescriptive approach may inhibit such initiatives.

The development of the ultra net has enormous potential to support and extend the development of school industry partnerships. Through such technology an industry portal could be developed whereby industries could register their availability as a resource to students; as mentors to both students and teachers and to provide opportunities for students to engage in research and industry investigations.

Industry could offer teachers an opportunity to establish and update currency in a similar manner to that required by VETIS Instructors. This would be of particular value to careers teachers and to all teachers aspiring to link studies to modern career pathways.

Tax incentives should be offered to industries that commit to providing work place learning opportunities through SWL, simulated work experience, industry tours, guest speakers in schools and other contributions that impact on costs should be supported to continue and expand such commitment encouraging other industries by their example.

Section 3: Arrangements that support and encourage young people to complete qualifications.

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

In South Gippsland the most significant obstacles to participation in VETIS are access and affordability. The provision of VETiS by external providers while beneficial to students has logistical barriers in moving students between venues. In rural areas students rely heavily on school bus networks that do not offer the flexibility of public transport.

In Qld 60% of students undertake a VETIS course as part of their senior studies. VETIS is embedded in the curriculum and therefore not as costly and underfunded as it appears to be in Victoria.

VETIS take up rates are higher when VETIS studies are embedded in the curriculum, timetabled and funded the same as other subjects. Schools resist arrangements that are costly or take students off campus It is common for students to undertake VETIS studies at years 10 and 11 so that year 12 preparation for exams is not 'interrupted' in this manner. This arrangement works well for schools and students.

Some schools have had great success by delivering VETIS by auspicing arrangements with an RTO. This has the benefit of delivering VETIS on site, with their own appropriately qualified staff whilst an external RTO manages compliance

and moderation. Schools utilizing auspicing as a method of delivery have lower costs and greater student participation rates.

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

VETIS and VCAL programs compete with VCE for the priority focus of schools, community and parents. Whilst schools work very hard to provide learning programs that meet the needs of all students, given a choice, academic disciplines are given priority over all other considerations, even though academic pathways will only be accessed by approximately one third of students. The determination of teachers to support young people to reach university is only to be admired and applauded, however the other two thirds need the same level of support to achieve their potential in vocational pathways. A successful student, building a career and contributing to our society is equal in value whether they are a plumber, retail assistant or lawyer. As a community we cannot afford to measure success by the size of a pay packet or degree of fame.

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

Specialisation is happening already with some schools choosing to focus on an academic curriculum and eschew the adoption of the more vocationally focused VCAL program. Schools that choose this pathway are often located in regions that cater to a larger population of families with parents who are both working with one or more employed in a professional career. Smaller communities with lower student numbers, isolated from other communities are also specializing because there is no choice. They need to rely on the skill sets of their staff and tap in to the expertise of their communities more creatively than larger schools. Other specializations that are already common relate to LOTE, music, sports programs and accelerated learning programs. VETIS is delivered through cluster arrangements between government and non government schools in partnership with TAFE, RTOs and some schools also registered as a training organisation (RTO)

What is not currently being recognized is the potential benefit of encouraging specialization. The trade training centre funding is a useful tool in achieving that goal by encouraging groups of schools to look at their training needs and establish appropriate infrastructure. This could and should go further, with additional funding and professional development to enable schools to take greater advantage of that infrastructure

How should schools, VETIS 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 qualification?

The student number combined with the new Ultranet program could provide a very useful tool in developing a system that encourages both retention and completion. The phrase 'fallen through the cracks' is often used to describe young people that the system loses to disengagement or families that frequently change schools. These young people are often serviced by several agencies all trying to do their best to 'fix' the problem. Processes to link schools, families and services in a co-ordinated therefore more supportive approach to student needs are currently inconsistent.

The Ultranet gives young people the opportunity to create a career/study plan linked to future goals and this would be so much more powerful if it also reflected the strengths, learning styles and past performances of the student. In this manner the student could work on their plan through a directed program at school and add to it from home, in conversation with parents or meeting with a case manager or service provider. Schools would not have total control of the plan but a school would also be better informed by a more holistic document reflecting not only plans and goals but also barriers that may need to be overcome to achieve those goals. Students may have greater success in completing a year or completing a subject area if they felt better supported by teachers, carers and service providers working.

This strategy would need to be student owned and directed and the key to accessing it could be the Victorian Student Number. Access to the number would only be gained by service providers through the student in much the same way as a jobseeker ID number. Various levels of access could also be built in to the program.

For young people who are at risk, navigating a path through a number of services depending on circumstances introduces a level of stress and confusion that contributes to poor engagement. An approach such as this would give a young person a greater feeling of control and have a positive impact on aspiration, health and well being.

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

It is widely accepted that year nine is the year when students are unsettled and in need of a more creative approach to their learning program. It has also become common practice for students to undertake VET programs in years 10 and 11 leaving year 12 for exam preparation.

A re designed year nine program could be a year of exploration for students to test their strengths and focus on their choice of subjects in year 10. This could include a greater emphasis on pre apprenticeship tasters (Cert 1 and 2) and 'try before you buy' programs that could include work placement and enterprise learning.

Implementation of virtual learning and flexible learning programs that are well scaffolded and exploit popular mediums would also improve access and completion.

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

Ensure that incentive payments are not the motivation for any party. This is critical to ensuring that students receive appropriate recognition for completed units and transferable skills and to have the opportunity for early completion of competency based training.

Ensure a period of work placement or pre apprenticeship training is undertaken prior to signing on. This could form part of the first three months of employment with the prospective apprentice being paid and the time credited to their apprenticeship. A formal assessment would need to be made at this point to ensure an appropriate match has been made and that the apprentice is well placed in a suitable pathway.

Incentive payments and training wages are useful tools in creation of apprenticeships. However they also create a point of abuse as some employers are reluctant to pay above the basic rates when earned or to allow apprentices to complete early.

Section 4: Systems that assist students to move more effectively between courses, institutions and sectors.

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

Access and affordability: the debate about access to University and affordability for rural students is well documented. Perhaps an alternative would be investment in flexible learning and 'virtual universities' where students in regional areas are assisted to undergo online or virtual attendance at Universities. Students enroll but don't leave home. Lectures are published on the internet and tutorial groups are delivered through on line forums. Communities are resourced to provide a local access centre (perhaps ACE sector?) where computers and supervision are available to assist in general university protocols, assignments, help with time management etc.

Virtual VETIS could also enable greater access to a wider variety programs in schools. The Gippsland Trade Training Centre models are based on this premise.

Clear, consistent and transparent RPL and credit processes agreed upon if not at a National Level at least at state level.

RPL and Credit processes that are not linked to outcome payments so there is no financial incentive for an organization to enroll students in subjects that may have been completed at school, at another RTO or able to be completed via RPL.

An assessment /examination tool for students wishing to articulate from VCAL to TAFE or to University that looks at skills and experience relevant to the chosen pathway as a measure to determine capacity to undertake that level of study.

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

Industry placements for teachers to stay current are a feature of VET in the TAFE sector and could extend to other areas of school curriculum.

The Work Place Learning coordinators role should be a valuable resource to schools. Increased understanding of how schools work and how industries work are critical to the success of this role; however schools are unwilling or unable to be flexible whilst demanding this from industry. The value of the relationship between industry and schools needs to be equitable (LLEN role). A directive to schools and appropriate resources to underpin the directive to engage with industry may create the desired shift in the way schools approach such partnerships.

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

Some of the shift needs to be in how applications for university are assessed. In most though not all subjects this is based entirely on the ENTER score with the level required being determined by the number of places offered and not necessarily the potential for success in that field of study or career pathway impacting on student aspiration.

There are universities that run a preparation year catering for students who don't quite make the score but once again having to choose this pathway impacts on aspiration and it devalues all but academic skills.

Entrance requirements need to consider the various learning styles and motivation of students. There are already examples of this in the creative arts. It has been said that a surgeon requires many of the same attributes as a plumber or an electrician.

University should play a significant role in secondary education from the middle years. This is not without precedent as the VETIS program takes exactly that approach when preparing young people for vocational careers. It is also the approach taken to ease the transition for primary to secondary school. Transitions are a feature of all our lives from birth and they are not confined to education. All require preparation in order to be successful and age has little to with that need other than set the scene.

Section 5: Articulation within the VETIS sector and from VETIS to higher education.

Should effort to improve VETiS to higher education articulation and credit arrangements focus on particular occupational pathways and skill priority areas, for example in engineering or nursing?

There is merit in this strategy as long as it is not short sighted responding to immediate needs without building in the potential to refocus as our needs change. There is a greater opportunity in this to create a pathway from VETiS to university generally as part of a policy to give greater choice to a wider range of learners.

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

As discussed in the previous question, articulation from VETiS to university pathways offers access to pathways addressing student choice. The demand for uptake in training that meets specific skill needs in the economy is a matter of marketing and promotion as these needs occur. These areas of study are usually the beneficiaries of increased funding and additional places encouraging students to take up those opportunities at the time. Putting the wrong person in the wrong training program is never successful regardless of demand therefore the provision of pathways that offer a range of options is essential.

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?

Virtual Universities could be established with an ongoing investment in technology accessed from rural hubs. A virtual university would be staffed locally with expertise in foundation skills such as time management, presentation, research, essay writing etc. Students would attend university without the necessity of relocating accessing tutorials and tutor support through video links with additional workshops and lectures each month or term.

Partnerships between universities and rural TAFE campuses need to be encouraged and expanded. RMIT and East Gippsland TAFE are an example of a relationship that has given rural students the chance to attend university daily without leaving home.

What other actions should be contemplated by institutions and government?

A competency based system that ensures research, essay writing and presentation skills is run in tandem with vocational pathways programs so that students are not as disadvantaged if they make a choice to change streams or move from TAFE to University.

Section 6: Opportunities for young people to reengage with education and training.

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

Youth Connections have a charter to work with the most disengaged young people in the system. They have the capacity to work one to one with a limited number of young people and in rural areas have limited access to other than mainstream education options.

Youth Connections will have a better chance of success if schools and communities can tap in to the resources needed to provide appropriate education settings for those who need it.

This could mean the availability specialist teaching staff within schools or development of enterprise learning projects as well as the currently popular off campus programs. If schools and communities are expected to find the resources from existing funds then access to consultants within the Education Department that can assist in building business plans that link enterprises to curriculum outcomes or that allow learning competencies to be achieved in nontraditional settings would allow these options to be pursued more confidently. Schools in particular would therefore be more comfortable with the authenticity and validity of such programs.

What services should youth connection service providers use to establish effective referral and working arrangements?

In the South Gippsland Bass Coast region, Youth Connections provides a case management service. They have established formal partnerships with two key service provider agencies within the region and have existing relationships with local schools. Youth Connections has a strong involvement with the LLEN and the LLEN and Youth Connections teams meet each term to explore issues of common interest and concern.

Should LLENs be provided some flexibility to facilitate and broker service provision to young people 20 and over, in line with the flexibility in Youth Service Provision

Partnership programs brokered by the LLEN often meet criteria that at the same time create opportunities for young people outside the designated age range.

In the pursuit of influencing better education and training pathways for young people LLENs have contributed to policy issues such as; changes to youth allowance; access to public transport and deferring a University offer*.

*J. Polese, (2009) Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria.

Most LLENs could easily identify young people, aged 20 and over, that have both directly and indirectly benefited from the activities and involvement of the LLEN.

The extreme nature and number of barriers facing some 'at risk' young people that LLENs address are not easily overcome. This being the case, ongoing support is

often needed to maintain connections to education and training, as well as gaining and sustaining employment, well beyond the age of 19 in order to successfully transition into adulthood.

Enhanced LLEN contracts clearly reflect current policy drive that recognises that earlier intervention is required. Adding to the identified cohort of 10-19 year olds, introduces a real danger that LLENs will need to:

- develop expertise on the needs of a larger range of already very diverse young people
- deliver on outcomes that are not funded for under current contracts
- again undertake significant governance changes, and
- be expected to become everything to everyone in a climate where we are still coming to terms with changes that occurred in 2010.

With current resources already spread thinly across the state, to formally broaden the age range would simply limit the capacity of LLENs. Even where additional resources were made available to assist in servicing another age range there are significant variances across the state that would make outcomes inconsistent.

Is the range of qualifications on offer to reengage young people adequate?

Disengagement is an issue much broader than the education environment. Issues such as learning styles and settings can be addressed through innovation in modes of delivery however cultural change and social issues are having a greater impact on engagement regardless of the qualifications currently on offer.

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