



# **Response to Discussion Paper on the Youth Transition System**

**7 June 2010**

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# 1 About Sunraysia Institute of TAFE

Sunraysia Institute of TAFE (SuniTAFE) is the largest provider of vocational education and training services in north-west Victoria covering a geographic area of 77,000 square kilometres. Through the delivery of a comprehensive range of programs the Institute is a major contributor to and an integral part of the social, cultural and economic well being of its community.

The Institute's vision states that, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE is recognised for its leadership role in transforming the educational, social, cultural and economic environment of the region and beyond.

Our traditional delivery areas reflected the industry base of the region – these were predominantly agriculture, horticulture, building, construction and associated trades, engineering, light and heavy automotive, community health and welfare, business and retail and hospitality services. Whilst we still deliver in the traditional areas, in recent years we have commenced training in new and emerging technologies such as renewable energy, we have incorporated green skills into trades training and we have established training in new industry areas. For example, we have a training partnership with a newly established mining company in the region which incorporates sustainability in its core values [www.iluka.com](http://www.iluka.com)

The north-west of Victoria has been characterised through the richness of its natural resources – abundant sunshine, ample supplies of water for irrigation from the Murray River and the accessibility of good farming land. The environment is changing due to ongoing drought, a changing landscape due to climate change, increasing competition through operating in a global market and the changing demographic profile of the region through an ageing population.

The region is facing a period of enormous structural change and adjustment and at SuniTAFE we believe that we have a role to play in assisting our community to make the transition to a new economic base. The region is ideally suited as a production centre for renewable energy (solar, wind and geothermal) and sustainable mining. It is therefore critical that SuniTAFE has the capacity to deliver in new industry and skill areas.

The Institute has had a specialist centre in environmental sustainability since 2002 through its partnership in the National Centre for Sustainability (NCS). When the NCS was established it had four TAFE Institute members with different specialisations – ours was conservation and land management. Over the years, the NCS – Sunraysia has broadened the projects that it undertakes.

Sunraysia Institute of TAFE is committed to using its position as a leading regional educational institution to promote environmental, economic and social sustainability through the programs that we deliver, the projects that we undertake and the work practices that we implement.

## **2 Introduction**

The response to the discussion paper has been prepared following consultation with literacy and numeracy teaching staff, vocational teachers, student support specialist staff and educational management staff from the Institute.

### **2.1 Current Context**

There has been a notable decline in the literacy and numeracy standards of students attending the Institute particularly in the last two to three years.

This coincides with an increase in Centrelink referred clients to the Institute. These students generally possess low levels of literacy and numeracy skills.

It was considered that the current statistics do not accurately reflect the local snapshot of literacy and numeracy levels of students attending the Institute. It was also considered that the levels are lower than that presented in the statistics.

It is estimated from anecdotal evidence that 20% to 30% of students enrolling in some courses at the Institute have little Literacy and Numeracy skills and they have skills below those offered in the CGEA qualification.

It is also estimated that there are approximately 500 to 600 disengaged youth in the Sunraysia area who have had minimal engagement in formal education beyond primary school and in some cases minimal levels of engagement during primary school years of education.

### **Stop Press**

The Institute has been a successful provider of the DEEWR funded LLNP program for a number of years. This program has provided funding to fill the gap for indigenous learners with very low levels of literacy and numeracy. The Institute has recently been informed that we have lost the tender and that there has not been a provider nominated in the Sunraysia and Murray Mallee regions – the regions that Sunraysia Institute of TAFE serviced. There will be a feedback session provided but at the time of writing, this has not been scheduled and the existing tender finishes on the 16th June 2010.

The decision to not award a tender will severely impact literacy and numeracy support for indigenous learners in the Sunraysia and Murray Mallee regions.

## **3 Strengthening Literacy and Numeracy in the Post-Compulsory Years**

### **3.1 What form should the proposed literacy standards take?**

#### **3.1.1 Alignment to Current Curriculum and Training Packages**

There was strong support for the principle of ensuring that Literacy and Numeracy standards need to be aligned to current curriculum and Training Package standards to allow for the recognition of these knowledge and skills within and across the education and training sectors.

The most appropriate model to implement appears to be one based on the mapping of standards across the Australian Core Skills Framework, the Australian Qualifications Framework to curriculum and Training Packages.

It has been observed that currently there are discrepancies between national curriculum and the NAPLAN testing.

#### **3.1.2 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer (CT)**

If students are aware that they are able to claim formal recognition either through RPL or CT for their previously acquired skills and knowledge and qualifications, this will provide incentive for students to study and improve their Literacy and Numeracy knowledge and skills.

Effective mapping of Literacy and Numeracy standards from sector to sector is essential to facilitate the processing of CT and RPL applications and being able to reward students for the acquired skills.

#### **3.1.3 Level of Literacy and Numeracy Skills**

It was suggested that the minimum standards for Literacy and Numeracy for entry into Vocational Education and Training (VET) should be Certificate II Level.

### **3.2 In what other ways can the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills be strengthened in the post-compulsory years?**

There have been a number of strategies and considerations suggested to strengthen the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills in the post-compulsory years. The key themes and ideas are presented below.

### **3.2.1 Engagement of Students**

Engagement in training was perceived to be a critical factor in achieving an increased acquisition of skills. It was suggested that the integration of Literacy and Numeracy skills into relevant vocational training increases the probability of ensuring that students will be engaged and acquire skills.

It was stressed by vocational teachers that Literacy and Numeracy skills are a foundation for the successful completion of Training Packages.

### **3.2.2 Provision of Intensive Support**

It was suggested that intensive support is required for students to be assisted to increase their Literacy and Numeracy skills.

### **3.2.3 Specialist Literacy and Numeracy Support in Vocational Training**

The provision of specialist support for literacy and numeracy teaching during vocational training was seen as a key means of increasing the effective acquisition of skills.

### **3.2.4 Streaming of Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) Students**

It was advocated that streaming of VCAL students could be beneficial in providing more support to students with lower levels of literacy and numeracy skills.

### **3.2.5 Provide for the Primary Needs of Students to Remove Barriers to Study**

It was discussed that for some students the main barrier to participation was that students often lack access to primary needs such as emotional support from families or communities, housing, food and clothing.

It was considered that these barriers need to be addressed before some students are able to study effectively.

**NOTE:** An environment that provides intensive support (such as the TEC model) has more success in engaging and retaining students than tradition settings. Sunraysia Institute of TAFE is developing plans for the implementation of a Technical Education Centre in order to service the youth cohort more effectively.

### **3.2.6 Motivation for Training**

Students are generally not sure of their career paths and therefore lack motivation and direction for study. Some students are not necessarily interested in qualifications but they study and are motivated and engaged by subjects that interest them for personal development and not necessarily for the long term.

### **3.2.7 Introduction of Timely and Formal Testing at the Appropriate Level of Literacy and Numeracy Skills**

It was commented by teachers that there is no formal test for Literacy and Numeracy skills at the level required to match their level of skills. Formal testing at lower levels of skills would enable appropriate support to be provided and also to measure the number of students requiring lower level support.

Apprentices are tested for Literacy and Numeracy levels within 28 days of commencing their training providing a means of early detection of individual needs for additional support.

### **3.2.8 The Requirement for Effective Transition Programs**

Teachers commented that a number of the students who are attempting to commence vocational training in a trade do not have the pre-requisite skills including Literacy and Numeracy skills. It was suggested that appropriate transitional programs may allow them to adjust and prepare for study more effectively.



## **4 Support for Making Informed Education and Training Choices**

### **4.1 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?**

#### **4.1.1 The Need for Holistic Career Planning**

It was generally considered that for a career plan to be effective in increasing engagement with education that it needs to be conducted in an holistic way rather than focussing on the one aspect of their lives such as employment.

An important focus for successful career planning is ensuring that students maintain their interest in what they are studying. This is likely to increase their engagement with education compared to assisting students to focus on gaining qualification which is considered unlikely to maintain their engagement in education and training.

Examples of holistic career planning would include but not be limited to such issues as;

- the individual's current life situation,
- an individual's strengths, weaknesses personal attributes and disabilities and self awareness of these issues,
- the current knowledge the person has about career opportunities and educational pathways,
- lifestyle and desired time commitment to employment,
- the level of personal interest in a career,
- the likely location of the preferred work or career opportunities,
- the social and cultural settings in which students live which influences their attitudes and exposure to role models and perceptions about careers,
- the pursuit of other personal interests, and
- the impact on employment and work and family or preferred living arrangements and locations.

#### **4.1.2 The Success of Career Planning and the Need to Satisfy the Primary Needs of Students**

As mentioned in point 3.2.5 the success of career planning is likely to be significantly impacted by whether a student's primary needs in life are being met. If housing or a stable home life is not being experienced, students will be unlikely to focus on or be in a position to make sensible and informed decisions about the pursuit of a career through education in preference to meeting their urgent or immediate needs.

This infers that linkage and alignment of other supportive programs for youth is necessary to assist and support them in developing, pursuing and achieving a career path.

#### **4.1.3 The Need for More Exposure to Career Planning at an Earlier Age**

It was considered that most secondary students have had limited exposure to career planning by the time they leave school and that this would have to be increased if career planning was to be successful in encouraging students to be more engaged in education.

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

#### **4.2.1 Increasing Student's Self Awareness and Career Opportunities and the Appointment of Career Development Coaches**

Students are often unaware of their potential to achieve in life as well as being equally unaware of the career opportunities which match their abilities and attributes.

Frequently, students tend to conclude that because they are not academically inclined that they are excluded from many careers opportunities.

Conducting sessions to analyse a student's current and potential abilities and strengths along the lines of the holistic approach defined in 4.1.1 would seem to have a much higher chance of success of continuing to engage students in education.

The appointment of specialist Career Development Coaches would be more likely to lead to the development of effective career planning.

#### **4.2.2 Inform Students of the Possibility of Completing Multiple Qualifications**

Students need to be made aware of the possibility of completing multiple qualifications, particularly in vocational education and training, so that they are able to capitalise on the available opportunities and plan more effectively for their future.

#### **4.2.3 Proactively Remove the Bias Towards an Academic Career as the Criteria for Success**

Culturally there is still a bias perception in the education system and in the community that to be successful a student needs to follow an academic path. This needs to be proactively challenged and corrected as this limits many viable more achievable options for students to pursue not being recognised or identified. Consequently effective career advice is not being provided to students in some cases and the most appropriate choices are not being offered to students to consider.

The community needs to be better informed about the characteristics of the VET sector in general to counter the bias to academic pursuits. They need to be informed that 10,000 enrolments occur annually at Sunraysia Institute of TAFE which is more than the total of the region's school enrolments put together.

#### **4.2.4 Effective Marketing of Vocational Education and Training**

More effective marketing of services offered by individual institutes and the VET system would provide students and career advisors more information on which to base their decisions.

Secondary school excursions to TAFE institutes as part of the curriculum and also 'Try a Trade Day' would provide ideal ways for secondary students to gain experience and to be informed about vocational education opportunities.

Where secondary students are actively engaged in activities in vocational areas such as hospitality during a 'Try a Trade Day' the impact of the visit is more profound than if students are involved in passive activities.

The provision of information about TAFE at Years 7 and 8 Secondary School levels would encourage students to consider vocational education and training from a younger age and increase the probably that they will consider viable options of study.

**NOTE:** Sunraysia Institute of TAFE has an annual 'Grow your Career Day' at its Mildura and Swan Hill campuses. In 2009 over 1000 students primarily from years 9 and 10 attended the day. The Institute's VETiS enrolments have shown significant growth in the two years since 'Grow your Career Day' began.

#### **4.2.5 Tailor Programs to Make Them More Stimulating and Interesting to Students to Achieve Higher Rates of Participation**

Vocational education and training programs could be offered in a more stimulating way appropriate for younger students to encourage them to choose vocational education and training programs as their first option. Engagement in meaningful, relevant and 'doing' activities compared to listening and inactive activities are likely to be more effective.

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

#### **4.3.1 Continue to Offer and Build on Work Placement Programs**

This is an area of activity which has been occurring for some time in both secondary schools and the VET sector. Business and industry make a valuable contribution to students gaining experience but currently this occurs on a voluntary basis with business and industry not receiving any reward for their contribution. It has often been raised that the education sector is 'wearing out its welcome' with willing businesses. For this type of program to be expanded it would seem reasonable that business and industry should be funded in some way to compensate them for the time they spend with work placement students.

#### **4.3.2 Industry to Present at Career Days/Events**

This is another successful strategy which is already working in some cases and could be expanded.

#### **4.3.3 Tours to be Conducted to Work Places**

Tours to work places provide students an opportunity to see firsthand how work places function and may stimulate students to become interested in a career path or alternatively excluding some choices from their list of options.

For reasons of costs and logistics such as hygiene, safety, intellectual property or other legislative and regulatory constraints tours are not always possible however, to all businesses.

#### **4.3.4 Industry Associations to Provide Career Information Such as Printed Material and Website Information**

There would be mutual benefits for students and industry if industry associations documented career information to attract young students to plan to work in their industry. Students may respect and be interested in information from industry and perceive it to be valid information on which to base their career plans along with information provided by career advisors etc. Industry could benefit from more potential employees.

#### **4.3.5 Documentation of Case Studies of Pathways to Work Including Education, Training and Work Experience**

Documentation of case studies of staff working in a range of positions in industry and the pathways they took to reach their current positions could produce valuable ideas for young people to assist in their career planning and also provide career advisors a rich source of information to support their role of advising and supporting young people to decide on career options.

**NOTE:** There is an opportunity to link the newly appointed Structured Work Placement Coordinator positions with the Skills for Growth program to solve industry workplace issues. The Coordinators could play an important role in educating industry about the program and the benefits of providing funded structured work place experience.

## **5 Arrangements that Support and Encourage Young People to Complete Qualifications**

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

#### **5.1.1 Effective Funding Models Which Act as Incentives for Cooperation Between Sectors**

Funding is at the core of motivation for sectors to work in partnership. If funding models are established which provide outcomes which are mutually beneficial to the partners then there will be much higher rate of willing participation in cooperative partnership arrangements.

It is important to develop a system that facilitates part-time enrolments which allow students to enrol in both secondary schools and TAFE institutes concurrently. This has some funding challenges that would require cooperative arrangements across two departments.

This would lead to increased enrolments in both sectors so that funding is maintained in both sectors or in fact increased as a result of these arrangements.

#### **5.1.2 More TAFE Teachers Delivering in Schools and Secondary Teachers Teaching in TAFE Institutes**

This will result in a greater empathy between the two sectors and also encourage more effective use of specialist skills and knowledge such as Literacy and Numeracy teaching skills.

The conduct of special vocational projects such as 'Australian Business Week' enables secondary school students to be exposed to a TAFE environment and become more aware of the study options available to them.

The provision of 'TAFE Taster' programs to Year 8 and 9 levels in secondary schools is an effective way of increasing engagement of students.

#### **5.1.3 Building on Current Formal Partnership Arrangements with Pilot Programs**

Stimulating pilot programs between the VET sector and secondary level education providers to showcase and develop partnership arrangements would provide examples for other providers to follow. Current successful partnerships would provide good examples to start a pilot program.

#### **5.1.4 VET Sector to Provide Year 13 as a Transition Year with Integrated Vocational Study and Employability Skills Training**

It has been recognised that there is a cohort of students who are exiting secondary school and intend to attend higher education but lack the necessary skills. A Year 13 Transition year conducted by the VET sector would provide these students an opportunity to develop these skills and complete a qualification which has formal integration and articulation arrangements to support their ambitions.

### **5.2 What additional actions should Government take to support young people to complete initial qualifications in the VET sector?**

#### **5.2.1 Fund Courses with Lower Demand**

Government funding of selected vocational courses where there is less demand but worthwhile career options, could increase student participation and completion rates for initial qualifications. This would have the impact of increasing training options for students and particularly relevant to rural areas

#### **5.2.2 More Support for Employers**

Increased support for employers with apprentices and trainees could assist apprentices and trainees to be supervised and trained more effectively in the workplace. Additionally, more support for employers when economic downturns occur could assist the retention of apprentices and trainees until the economy improves and improve the ability of businesses to respond to increased levels of business as the economy improves.

#### **5.2.3 Increase Financial Incentives for Apprentices and Trainees**

Additional financial incentives for apprentices and trainees, particularly the 18 to 20 year olds could assist in supporting increased retention and completion rates

#### **5.2.4 Continue the Establishment of TECs in TAFE Institutes**

The establishment of TECs in TAFE institutes would provide more opportunities for students to study vocational skills in an alternative and more appropriate setting to secondary schools.

#### **5.2.5 Ensure That Programs Engage Students with Vocational Skills Training at an Early Stage in the Course**

It has been observed that some students are misled by promising exciting programs which do not live up to standard. Rather than vocational skills they are taught communication and OHS skills. While it is recognised these skills are essential engagement is more likely to come from vocational 'doing' activities for a proportion of students.

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

#### **5.3.1 The Impact of Increased Institutional Specialisation**

Institutional specialisation could help overcome some of the current issues in regional Victoria where a competitive model frequently leads to duplication of resources in already thin markets.

### **5.4 How should schools, VET providers and system authorities use the new transparency and accountability arrangements in Victorian schools and the Victorian Student Number to improve the completion rates for Year 12 or equivalent qualifications?**

#### **5.4.1 Focus Partnerships on Appropriate Schools**

The transparency arrangements may assist in identifying areas for improvement in school performance and lead to the use of VET providers to assist in cooperative arrangements to achieve these improvements.

#### **5.4.2 Tailor Services to Meet Student Cohort Needs**

Through identifying student cohort characteristics their educational needs could be more effectively met.

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

#### **5.5.1 Strategies for Increasing Qualification Completion Rates for Young People**

The following strategies could be used to increase qualification completion rates:

- Introduce compulsory study groups for missed classes
- Support flexible and blended Numeracy and Literacy provision
- Focus on student culture and provide appropriate means of support available
- Build partnerships with local welfare groups
- Introduce educational pathways commencing in Year 8 and 9 with;
  - induction into VET programs
  - where Year 10 and 11 complete a Certificate II, and
  - Year 12 commence School-based Apprenticeships and complete VCAL and VCE

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

### **5.6.1 Improve Employer Awareness of Training Role**

If employers are assisted with training strategies, particularly those relating to motivating apprentices to learn this will most likely have positive outcomes in terms of completions.

The Structured Workplace Coordinator positions that have recently been funded have a role to play in industry engagement and education.

### **5.6.2 Industry to Offer Scholarships**

Industry could offer VET or Trade Scholarships (such as Defence Force Trade Scholarships) which require students to complete Year 12 as part of accepting the scholarship.

### **5.6.3 Involvement in Improving the Effectiveness of Off the Job Training**

Employers could assist in improving the quality of off the job training by working in partnership with training providers. This will result in apprentices being better prepared for the workplace.

## **6 Systems that Assist Students to Move Effectively Between Courses, Institutions and Sectors**

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

#### **6.1.1 Ensure all Sectors Curriculum is in Alignment**

Ensuring all education sectors curriculum are aligned and mapped effectively and an increase in effective integrated study models between education sectors should allow students to transition more easily between sectors.

#### **6.1.2 Mentoring Programs for Students**

Providing mentoring programs for students to assist with transitions between sectors would provide the necessary support to students to move between sectors successfully and have the potential to remove transitional barriers.

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

#### **6.2.1 Increase Work Experience**

There could be an increase in the level of work experience implemented in schools. However there is currently demand on employers to provide work placement for students at school, in VET and from universities and this puts a strain on their resources.

Facilitating a coordinated approach should be one of the key tasks of the newly appointed Structured Workplace Coordinators.

#### **6.2.2 Skilling of Teachers Through Work Placement Programs**

Industry release for teachers to maintain their level of expertise and to develop new areas of expertise in the world of work could be beneficial.

It is also possible that partnership arrangements between teachers and businesses may be mutually beneficial with teachers contributing valuable expertise to businesses and their ongoing development.

#### **6.2.3 Invite Businesses to Participate in Educational Activities**

Inviting businesses to participate in educational activities may be considered so that students are exposed to more industry and business activity. Employers could benefit from attracting future staff to their businesses.

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

6.3.1 Schools should be encouraged to undertake trade or technical training for students from year 7 as an alternative stream. This would provide information at an earlier age, improve retention and increase success rates. It would also better prepare students for tertiary study.

## **7 Partnerships Between Universities and Schools will be Further Encouraged**

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

#### **7.1.1 Year 13 Qualification**

In general it appears that articulation and integration arrangements from the VET sector to higher education should be broad and not focussed on particular occupational pathways.

There is support for a Year 13 Transition qualification which would allow exiting VCE and VCAL students to further develop skills through a VET provider before moving onto tertiary education.

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

7.2.1 This can be achieved by ensuring that articulation pathways are identifiable through the Australian Qualifications Framework.

### **7.3 How can governments improve provision and articulation arrangements to better support young people, especially in regional and rural areas, to access tertiary qualifications without needing to re-locate?**

#### **7.3.1 Strategies for Provision of Articulation and Integration of Qualifications**

It is recommended that the following strategies be used to improve articulation and integration of qualifications:

- Promote and develop integration of qualifications across education sectors programs
- Adjust timetabling in education facilities to meet the needs of integration of qualifications
- Increase auspicing arrangements and focus on maintaining quality of qualification delivery
- Increase the effective Professional Development for staff in different education sectors
- Deliver training services in more remote locations

- Establish education facilities based on the 'Hub' concept to increase access to education and facilities for more students.

#### **7.4 What other actions should be contemplated by institutions and government?**

7.4.1. The current admissions process is not ideal – especially for VET applications. It focuses on higher education; it creates competition between states and between sectors and it is very rigid in terms of start dates. A flexible system that is easy to understand and provides for rolling enrolments would encourage access to the VET sector in a more meaningful way.

## **8 Opportunities for Young People to Re-engage with Education and Training**

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

Current services in the region appear to be in place and working.

### **8.2 What services should Youth Connection service providers use to establish effective referral and working arrangements?**

Current services in the region appear to be in place and working.

### **8.3 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 Connections service provision?**

#### **8.3.1 Brokering of Service Provision of Qualifications by the LLEN**

It is considered that the LLEN may have a role as an independent broker of service provision for qualifications for youth but in the 16 to 19 year old range.

### **8.4 Is the range of qualifications on offer to re-engage young people adequate? (Existing qualifications include VCAL, adult VCE, the General Certificate of Adult Education and the Diploma of Further Education.)**

#### **8.4.1 A Qualification for Disengaged 16 to 19 Year Old Youth**

There is a significant gap in qualifications for disengaged youth 16 to 19 years of age who have left school or had little attendance at school from Year 8 and 9. These students have Literacy and Numeracy skill levels which are below those taught in the CGEA qualification and require a high level of specialist support.

It has been identified that there is a need to have an introductory course for these students which covers Literacy and Numeracy at a basic level.

These students typically have not responded to a school environment and curriculum and also require a program that will interest and engage them with a 'here and now' approach. They also typically have been disengaged from the community and a supportive home life and as a result they require emotional and life skills support.