



Stronger Futures for all young Victorians

VASSP Response to discussion paper

Introduction

VASSP welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this discussion paper. The issues around student transition from school to tertiary education or work are critical for the future health of the nation. For too long, these issues have not been seriously addressed by government, some sectors of secondary education, tertiary institutions or industry. The mindset seems to have been that young people can either sink or swim.

Therefore it is timely that this discussion paper stimulates thinking and hopefully leads to better outcomes for our young people.

Strengthening Literacy and Numeracy in the post compulsory years

Improving literacy and numeracy acquisition at the post compulsory levels is a huge challenge. In a developmental sense students are literacy and numeracy “ready” at a young age and if they have failed to acquire these skills to a sufficient level at late teens then there are significant personal, social and learning issues to overcome.

Therefore there is a great need to ensure that students in primary school acquire these skills. Intervention should happen early, be sustained and be effective. Intervention needs to be focussed on the individual and not restricted by a set program (e.g. Early Years) or by limited resources. The cost of trying to assist a young person to acquire these skills later in life far exceeds the cost of a targeted early investment.

Addressing the crowded curriculum in primary education would allow more time to address literacy & numeracy.

However we are still in the position of needing to assist young people now. Beyond Yr 10, literacy and numeracy tend to take a back seat and are no longer mandated in VCE although they are in VCAL for Yr 11.

Resourcing programs that support students with learning difficulties that inhibit their reading skills, such as dyslexia, are essential. Most adults who struggle with literacy have undiagnosed learning problems or have not had timely intervention programs. Similarly with numeracy.

Programs that address acquisition of literacy and numeracy at the post compulsory years need to be embedded in a context. Students need to understand how these skills

are related to what they want to do in life. In this sense we need to broaden the definition of we mean by being literate.

The consultation paper calls for strengthening literacy and numeracy acquisition but should define the basis of comparison for the term “strengthened”.

Actions

1. *Improve resourcing to enable early and accurate diagnosis of student learning problems during the school years, particularly the early years*
2. *Resource intervention programs to target the needs of individual students i.e. personalised learning*
3. *Broaden the definition of literacy, clearly define standards around what is meant by “strengthened” and embed literacy and numeracy in a challenging, engaging and relevant curriculum*

Support for making informed education and training choices

Victoria has an effective model of raising career awareness through the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPS) program but it is severely under resourced and consequently can be quite ineffective in some schools.

Career education needs to be enhanced by better training for careers teachers and the provision of more career advisory services. Schools also need to be resourced so that external providers can be engaged to deliver programs in schools.

Actions

4. *Improved resourcing to raise career awareness e.g. MIPS*
5. *Improved resourcing to enhance the availability of careers advisory services both in and out of school*
6. *Enhanced training programs for careers teachers*

Arrangements that support and encourage young people to complete qualifications

The way to increase student completion is to provide challenging, high interest and engaging programs. This needs to encompass optional pathways to cater for different students’ needs in senior secondary school.

This requires a reduction on the emphasis on VCE as the main vehicle to post school education. Is the ENTER, as the main method of selection into tertiary education, an efficient system to get the right student into the right course? The answer for many students is a resounding no.

Perhaps it could be replaced with a “B grade” average system as per the USA but don’t allow the particular school attended to be a factor. That is, ensure the entry system is competency based. Many University courses are now decided by student portfolios and interview.

The Bradley reforms will have a significant impact on the tertiary sector and affords us a unique opportunity to bring our tertiary selection processes into the 21st century and away from our current unique model of sorting students.

The consultation paper refers to developing partnerships between providers. In many localities this has been happening for many years. But to be successful all partners need to contribute equitably. Too often the government school sector does the heavy lifting whilst the non government school sector cherry picks courses and therefore is selective in its provision. If we are serious about broadening provision and therefore impacting on completion then all partners need to be made accountable.

It also needs to be acknowledged that partnerships for rural and remote schools are highly problematic. Staffing, distance and transport costs are significant inhibiting factors and impact directly on provision and completion. How is it intended that these issues are addressed?

We do not believe that a select school specialisation model is appropriate in the Victorian context. We observe the model in NSW with some 28 select entry schools and see clearly the residualisation of the neighbouring schools. Quality education is an entitlement for all, not just those who can afford it or who are academically bright.

We need schools that can address the needs of a wide cohort of students, with at times, access to specialist facilities. We need to rethink how access to those facilities can be made available to all students regardless of location. However this does not mean that schools need to specialise. This actually can restrict provision and force students to move schools to access an area of interest. Many students, for a variety of reasons, are reluctant to do this and thus their program provision is reduced.

We need to develop systems where students can access residential short courses or in some cases mobile or remote provision. There will be enormous cost & logistic challenges but if we want seamless service provision, the system needs to invest to achieve it.

An essential aspect of any provision is VETiS programs. The funding model for VETiS is unsustainable. The design of the model needs to acknowledge growth and external provider costs.

Growth can be addressed by funding students in the same way as the rest of the SRP. That is per student.

External provider costs can be addressed in a number of ways. Fees could be capped for certain courses and match the SRP rate. Parents could be asked to pay any gap between the SRP rate and the provider cost or providers could be directly subsidised down to the level of the SRP rate.

The likelihood that VETiS provision will narrow is high given the demand model funding being introduced to TAFE, the inadequate and fixed funding in the banding dollars to schools and the tightening of rules around parent payments. If we are really serious about completion, retention and articulation of students to tertiary courses these issues have to be addressed.

This also raises the issue of the status of VCAL. This program has retained a large cohort of students in education that would otherwise have dropped out of school as the somewhat narrow academic approach of the VCE fails to meet their needs. It is

critical that VCAL is presented as a viable and equal pathway with the VCE. VCAL also needs to find a place on the national stage as early indications of the National Curriculum will certainly not meet the needs of this cohort of students.

Essentially, improved completions for VCE and VCAL, requires better and broader provision, improved teaching and better pre apprenticeship programs.

The involvement of business and industry is highly desirable but quite difficult. The demands of business don't always mesh with the schools and they have quite different cultures. Often small business does not have the expertise or the resources to really engage with schools. Likewise schools are often in the same position of wanting to engage but not having the time, expertise or resources to do so.

Actions

7. *Review the ENTER as the main selection method to tertiary education*
8. *Ensure accountability of schools in the non government sector in developing partnerships*
9. *Address and resource partnership constraints, such as distance, for rural and remote schools*
10. *Resource mobile, residential and Internet provision of courses for rural students so that comprehensive provision is realised without undue specialisation*
11. *Ensure the funding model for VETiS is sustainable e.g. fund per student as with the SRP*
12. *Enhance the provision of VCAL and push for a national equivalent as part of the national curriculum*
13. *Address the costs of external providers*
14. *Enhance the resources available to schools to encourage connections with business and industry*

Systems that assist students to move effectively between course, institutions and sectors

The transition of students from one level of education to another creates challenges at all points of transition. There are significant disconnects in terms of funding models, communication and expectations.

In terms of secondary to tertiary many students don't cope with the lecture style teaching model that exists in universities & TAFE. They also struggle with the lack of pastoral support provided when compared with schools. This is especially true for rural students.

If we want to increase participation and ease transition issues then there is an urgent need to improve student support and wellbeing. This includes financial support for rural students as living away from home costs are significant. Additionally if students are required to engage in sometimes long hours of poorly paid casual employment to defray costs they are more likely not to complete.

Actions

15. *Increase student support and wellbeing e.g. financial support for students living away from home*

16. Enhance pastoral support at tertiary level to ease the transition from secondary education

Partnerships between universities and schools will be further encouraged

There is considerable goodwill existing between schools and TAFEs but the different funding models often get in the way of improving partnerships. This issue needs to be addressed if progress is to be made.

A focus on occupations in terms of credit arrangements has some alluring features. Presumably students would be focussed on their career choice and therefore the course would be relevant and hopefully engaging.

However we need to be cautious. We must guard against narrowing the range of subject offerings. We also must keep in mind that education is much more than training. It is an experience that encompasses intellectual, personal and social growth. Whilst it does need to satisfy our workforce requirements it also has to satisfy our societal requirements around productive citizenship, social values, respect and tolerance. It is as much about the person as it is about job preparation.

The concept of a training entitlement that guarantees access and support could be explored. The introduction of a “year 13” could also help as this could be delivered closer to home in a more supportive atmosphere.

Actions

- 17. Better align funding models to ensure equity of provision*
- 18. Explore the introduction of a Year 13 as a way of offering pastoral support and tertiary bridging programs*
- 19. Ensure that programs satisfy social and emotional issues as well provide skills for job preparation*

Opportunities for young people to re-engage with education and training

There is an opportunity to enhance the role of the LLENs to enable them to not only broker service provision but to provide a focal point for tracking & providing 1:1 counselling support for young people 17 – 21. Perhaps their role could also include the tracking of older students.

This would give priority to the LLENs role in enhancing connections between providers.

The introduction of the National Curriculum highlights the issue of the appropriateness of the various qualifications and what status each may have. The essential point is that curriculum provision has to be able to engage the whole cohort in a meaningful way, including young people who wish to re-engage with education.

This is about the type of course but it is also about student health and wellbeing and sufficient support being provided.

Actions

- 20. Enhance the LLEN to offer counselling, tracking and brokerage services*

21. Ensure curriculum provision is broad enough to cater for all students in the cohort

Conclusion

National and State government targets for student retention have a history of inadequate attainment. The reason for this is highlighted by the actions VASSP has identified. As a community we have paid lip service to better retention in order to increase our workforce skills to cater for the “knowledge economy”.

However the reality is we have not had the courage to invest in programs that will develop our human capital. Australia and Victoria are all the poorer for this failure of leadership. Continued inaction will condemn us to be Asia’s quarry.

Summary of Actions

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2. *Resource intervention programs to target the needs of individual students i.e. personalised learning*
3. *Broaden the definition of literacy, clearly define standards around what is meant by “strengthened” and imbed literacy and numeracy in a challenging, engaging and relevant curriculum*
4. *Improved resourcing to raise career awareness e.g. MIPS*
5. *Improved resourcing to enhance the availability of careers advisory services both in and out of school*
6. *Enhanced training programs for careers teachers*
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11. *Ensure the funding model for VETiS is sustainable e.g. fund per student as with the SRP*
12. *Enhance the provision of VCAL and push for a national equivalent as part of the national curriculum*
13. *Address the costs of external providers*
14. *Enhance the resources available to schools to encourage connections with business and industry*
15. *Increase student support and wellbeing e.g. financial support for students living away from home*
16. *Enhance pastoral support at tertiary level to ease the transition from secondary education*
17. *Better align funding models to ensure equity of provision*
18. *Explore the introduction of a Year 13 as a way of offering pastoral support and tertiary bridging programs*
19. *Ensure that programs satisfy social and emotional issues as well provide skills for job preparation*
20. *Enhance the LLEN to offer counselling, tracking and brokerage services*
21. *Ensure curriculum provision is broad enough to cater for all students in the cohort*