Feedback *Stronger Futures for all young Victorians* – DEECD discussion paper

The following responses are submitted on behalf of the combined Northern region Youth Connections Consortia; Hume Whittlesea Youth Connections (HWYC), Inner Northern Youth Connections (INYC) and Banyule Nillumbik Youth Connections (BNYC). We have responded only to the questions we felt most relevant to Youth Connections (p37 of the discussion paper).

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

Consortia members feel that the flexibility of the guidelines is very appropriate when working with disengaged young people and should contribute to effective re-engagement, however early experience in the delivery of Youth Connections suggests that more funding is required to meet the real need in the region. Although only 5 months into the program, referrals to date indicate that capacity will be met well prior to the end of the year. For some regions, the cessation of YTSI funding at the end of the year will also affect Youth Connections capacity to meet demand as it is anticipated that young people will be transferred from YTSI to Youth Connections.

It is also felt that access to brokerage funds to assist young people in Type 2b services would also enhance the effectiveness of Youth Connections.

With more direction and accountability to schools regarding student retention it also felt that Youth Connections could more effectively re-engage young people in education. Some suggest that school funding should follow the student rather than remaining with schools post census date. Case managers are increasingly reporting a poor response from some schools when working to re-engage young people into education.

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

Youth Connections has now been operating since January 2010.

Across the Northern region the BNYC, INYC and HWYC Consortia have implemented the same model of service delivery to ensure effective and referral and seamless working arrangements.

The model identifies a number of possible referral points for young people on a continuum of at risk of disengaging through to severely disengaged. These include Centrelink or JSA, existing programs and services that are in the region for young people and their families, specialist services, case finding and assertive outreach, and self referral. Referral networks are strengthened with agencies through promotion of Youth Connections and through

consortia activities in strengthening services in the region (Type 4) and identification of eligible young people will be achieved through the activities undertaken in Type 3 across the region by Consortia members (Type 3).

Type 1 & 2a services in schools

The primary referral point for this group is local schools.

Case Managers build on existing relationships with schools and are consolidating a triage approach with Welfare Co-ordinators, Careers Teachers, Year level Co-ordinators and Managed Individual Pathway (MIPs) staff. Collaboration with schools around the MIP's activities in schools is undertaken by the Case Managers working within the school environment.

Type 2a & 2b services - out of school

Referral points are:

- Youth agencies
- Welfare agencies
- Centrelink offices
- TAFE (where young people have not gained a place in a TAFE course because they do not meet the entry requirements for their particular course and are early school leavers)
- Local Government Youth Services
- JSA s (where Youth Connections is more appropriate for the young person)

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?

In general, consortia members do not think LLENs should be provided more flexibility to broker services for young people 20 and over. Youth Connections services are provided to young people 13-19 with the opportunity to work outside eligibility criteria for 10% of the number of young people allocated within business levels.

It is felt that extending the current focus of LLEN ie the age range of 10-19, to include 20 and over would stretch LLEN resources too far, that a whole new range of networks, understanding, knowledge and expertise would need to be developed to meet the needs of this older age group. This would require considerable additional funds.

However, consortia members do acknowledge that the issues faced by young people within the Humanitarian cohort who are 20 and over are similar in many ways to the cohort assisted under Youth Connections.

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 Diploma of Further Education)

Consortia members feel that it is not so much the range of qualification that are inadequate but that the current structure for delivery is inadequate. School settings, environment and pedagogy do not meet the needs of all students. Current policy seems to force schools into a model that emphasises VCE and that those young people who do not fit in are often pushed into VCAL. There are not enough options for young people who do not the fit the school model. More alternatives need to be provided that sit within the system and are supported and respected in the same way that VCE is.

Policy needs to lead the way in changing attitudes towards greater respect for and valuing of all learning options and including this within accountability frameworks. In many ways it seems schools are 'punished' for providing what are considered non-academic options.

Consortia members also feel that the qualifications listed above do not meet the needs of disengaged young people less than 15 years who are currently out of school.