



Youth Transitions Consultation Report

Stronger futures for all young Victorians

Introduction

On 19 April 2010, the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development released *Stronger Futures for All Young Victorians: Discussion Paper on the Youth Transitions System*.

The paper discussed ways in which parents, educators, mentors, employers and governments can work together to assist young people make a successful transition from compulsory schooling to independent adult working life.

The paper identified a range of data that indicates that Victoria's current performance is very strong. This includes:

- the percentage of Victorian students at or above the minimum standard in the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy, where our performance is consistent with the strongest performing Australian jurisdictions;
- the percentage of 20-24 year olds who attain year 12 or its educational equivalent, which is higher than any other Australian state;
- the high percentage of Victorians that make a successful transition to further education, training or employment in the year following year 12; and
- the percentage of the population aged 25-34 years with tertiary qualifications, which is very high by OECD standards.

Despite this, the paper acknowledged that some young Victorians miss out and others could be supported to achieve more. The paper identified five key areas for potential reform:

1. strengthening literacy and numeracy in the post compulsory years;
2. support for making informed education and training choices;
3. arrangements that support and encourage young people to complete qualifications;
4. systems that assist students to move effectively between courses, institutions and sectors; and
5. opportunities for young people to re-engage with education and training.

Between 10 May and 3 June 2010, a series of regional forums and an online forum were held to discuss these issues, with over 350 participants.

The participants were diverse. They came from different education and training sectors (schools, vocational education and training – including the adult community education sector – and higher education). Some were from local government. Others represented organisations that support young people in various ways: some in the government sector (eg Local Learning and Employment Networks) and others in the non-government and not-for-profit sectors. The voices of industry and employers were also prominent.

Many of those who participated in the forums also took the opportunity to provide their views through written submissions, and over 70 submissions were received.

The discussion paper, details about the consultation process and the written submissions can be accessed at these links: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/consultation/strongerfutures.htm> and www.skills.vic.gov.au/corporate/programs-and-initiatives/youth-transitions/youth-transitions-discussion-paper

This paper reports back on this consultation process. It summarises the ideas of organisations and individuals under the five key areas of potential reform. The paper also highlights recent announcements designed to improve youth transitions in Victoria, particularly through the Tertiary Education Access Plan.

General Comments

The public forums brought together a range of professionals, passionate in their commitment to help all young people reach their potential. They showcased the individuals and organisations that provide tremendous support to thousands of young Victorians, many of whom would otherwise struggle to make the transition from compulsory schooling to independent adult working life.

In general terms, respondents agreed that the five key potential reform areas constituted fertile ground to enhance support for an even greater number of young Victorians in the transition process. They stressed that these reform areas are interdependent and should be treated as such.

While the discussion paper dealt with the 15 – 24 year old cohort, respondents stressed the importance of addressing educational and related needs earlier in life. For example, while addressing literacy and numeracy in the senior secondary years was viewed as very important, the key challenge is to ensure that as few young Victorians as possible develop these deficits in the first place. This requires effective policies and programs in the early years of life and schooling.

The consultation process frequently involved discussion of youth policies and programs delivered through both the Commonwealth and State Governments. Respondents called on governments to ensure proper coordination of services delivered for young people across various government agencies.

The consultation process also showcased the benefits that innovative partnerships bring for young people. In public forums and written submissions, respondents outlined recent developments that are enabling more young people to reconnect with education and training, or move from school to tertiary education.

Innovative Partnerships

Melbourne Citymission – Return to Learn program

Melbourne Citymission has developed a pre-vocational program entitled Return to Learn, a group numeracy and literacy program which aims to build the confidence of severely disengaged young people to re-engage with education, employment or training. The emphasis is on practical and experiential learning: life skills, vocational pathway planning, employability skills, some accredited training/certificates, industry and TAFE visits, and practical driving lessons and driver theory. The program aims to build young people's knowledge about potential learning pathways and to develop interests and aspirations for their future.

Key Themes

1. Strengthening literacy and numeracy in the post compulsory years

“Beyond Year 10, literacy and numeracy tend to take a back seat and are no longer mandated in VCE. 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.”

(submission from the Victorian Association of Secondary School Principals)

“...literacy and numeracy levels are an issue for all levels in the workplace, including new entrants such as apprentices, trainees and school leavers.”

(submission from the Australian Industry Group)

The consultation process illustrated the importance of young people possessing sound literacy and numeracy skills as a base-level requirement to succeed in education, training and the workforce. Many of the participants highlighted the stark consequences for young people that do not have these skills. These include:

- high risk of dropping out of school early;
- high risk of disengaging from education, training and employment; and
- potential barrier to accessing employment based pathways such as apprenticeships, where these skills are required to work productively and safely.

Respondents were unanimous in their view that the best approach is to identify and tackle problems in the early years of life and schooling.

For those that still have difficulties later in schooling, respondents had a range of ideas. These included:

- improve information sharing between education and training providers on students' literacy and numeracy achievement. This is particularly important for those young people who leave school and move to the VET sector.
- increase the capability of the teaching and TAFE trainer workforce in language, literacy and numeracy development.

“Sharing data such as NAPLAN results with all schools and the TAFE and ACE sector would ensure that young people who have ongoing literacy and or numeracy issues are more easily identified.”

(submission from the Inner East LLEN)

There was also support for the idea that young people assessed below minimum NAPLAN standards in Year 9 should be guaranteed the additional support required in the next phase of education and training.

The discussion paper noted that in recent years an increasing proportion of OECD jurisdictions and Australian States and Territories have introduced literacy and numeracy requirements into entry-level qualifications. Feedback was sought on whether this should be pursued in Victoria with the Victorian Certificate of Education and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning.

The consultation process revealed that support for this idea was mixed, ranging from strong support, to requests for clarification, to opposition.

Some respondents felt that the idea has merit, as it could potentially lead to a greater focus and concentration of resources on literacy and numeracy teaching and learning. Some felt that this would extend back to the earlier years of schooling, enabling Victoria to reduce the number of young people assessed with literacy and numeracy deficits at a later stage such as Year 9.

Some respondents raised questions and offered suggestions about the content of any attempt to develop literacy and numeracy standards. Swinburne Institute of Technology made this point in their written submission:

“We believe that L&N standard setting should not just focus on academic standards, but also on L&N as they pertain to life skills – technical and practical L&N as well as academic and these should be referred to in an equal way, not as one being superior or more highly sought and rewarded than the other. That is, the form of the standards needs to be relevant and linked to pathways and goals.”

Other respondents warned that this proposal could be counterproductive. They suggested that the introduction of standards could end up penalising the very people that the proposal is designed to help – young people with literacy and numeracy deficits. That is, if young people don't meet standards, will they effectively be marginalised? Some requests for clarification about the proposal concentrated on how this scenario could be avoided.

2. Support for making informed education and training choices

“Students who have access to career planning and real experiences in the workplace are better placed to make informed and meaningful decisions about the education and training pathways for their future careers.”

(submission from the Australian Education Union)

Many of the participants in the public consultation process are directly involved in the provision of advice and support to young people that assists them to make informed education and training choices. These individuals and organisations confirmed that this is a vital element of the youth transitions system. Young people need to have an understanding of their career and study alternatives, interests and aptitudes to be able to select the pathway that is right for them.

Respondents believe that it is difficult for students and parents to navigate their way through education and training options. Recognising the joint responsibility for career guidance, respondents recommended that teachers, students, parents and career coaches alike broaden their understanding and experience of what is available in the workplace, the nature of work today and how it will change over time.

Respondents supported the focus on developing integrated and high quality careers services that build aspirations from a young age and develop skills to self manage careers. Respondents noted that although making career choices at a young age is difficult, students should begin thinking about careers at the earliest opportunity.

There was a clear view that the careers function in schools must always be considered and treated as a valued and mainstream part of school services.

Feedback suggested that students need to be exposed to a much wider range of career options through work experience and other initiatives that introduce students to industries and careers.

Respondents saw a need for employers and education providers to increasingly work together and to innovate in the areas of career education and curriculum development. Further feedback noted the need for better coordination and logistical support to help employers and industry work with education providers in order to deliver a diversity of learning and employment opportunities in a range of settings.

The consultations also noted that parental guidance, support, and awareness of available options is very significant in influencing career choices. Engaging and building the capacity and skills of parents, carers and other adults significant in a student's life are crucial in helping young people to make informed career choices and engage in the career planning process.

The discussion paper asked respondents to comment on the potential benefits of requiring students enrolling in senior secondary certificates to have a "career plan" to link education experiences to career interests.

Respondents were generally supportive, but stressed that work would be required to ensure that career plans would be more than just "a piece of paper". They would need to be dynamic and flexible and students would have to be encouraged to develop a sense of ownership over the plan. The development process must also be relevant and engaging for students. Options for the type of plan to be produced were discussed, with interest being shown in visual and ICT enabled platforms.

Some respondents made the point that career plans need to focus on work and life goals rather than specific career choices or gaining a place in a particular education institution.

"Students should have a learning pathway document that incorporates points of flexibility and options as they begin to explore areas of interest during educational and training experiences. The focus should be on life-long learning and exposure to options instead of making definitive choices in the initial stage."

(submission from Jobs Australia)

"Career investigation needs to be integrated into curriculum and teaching from primary school. Access to quality information and trained careers advisors will allow students time to develop a career plan."

(submission from Bendigo Senior Secondary College)

The discussion paper noted some recent developments in this area through the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, including:

- development of a dedicated careers curriculum for Years 7 to 12;
- provision of greater professional development opportunities for eligible careers advisors; and
- the establishment of Regional Careers Coaches to support education and training providers to improve services to students and their families.

Respondents generally supported a dedicated careers curriculum, although there was some concern about a "crowded" curriculum.

Respondents were supportive of the National Partnership's focus on assisting more careers staff to gain qualifications.

"A career plan hinges significantly upon the quality of the advice and direction given...the building of professional skills of careers advisors are critical."

(submission from Chisholm Institute of TAFE)

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

The public forums and submissions highlighted a number of innovative programs and practices being pursued to help young people – particularly those who are at risk of dropping out – complete their courses in school and the VET sector. Respondents agreed that these approaches are necessary, given research showing that young people are more likely to make a successful transition into the workforce if they have attained a Year 12 or equivalent qualification.

Respondents noted that the government and education and training sectors must work together to ensure that all students have access to the subjects and pathways that interest them. They agreed that the needs and interests of young people are diverse, and that this requires a collaborative and flexible approach to provision.

Respondents reported on a number of innovative arrangements that are already in place, such as VET cluster arrangements, that enable providers to leverage options for students. Many respondents called for further support of these arrangements, as well as “hub” models, where universities, TAFEs and secondary schools work in partnership to deliver a greater variety of courses to students.

“Greater levels of specialisation could improve any shared cluster or alliance arrangements, particularly in regional areas, which would allow greater access to an increased variety of VET while avoiding duplication.”

(submission from Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN)

The ability to track students was identified as a key factor in retaining students. Respondents discussed ways in which the Victorian Student Number could be used to track student enrolment and achievement throughout the post compulsory years, and how this information might be used to improve qualification completion rates. Two key themes emerged in relation to this:

- the opportunity for providers to examine students’ study records, completions and enrolments to ensure that due recognition is given to prior attainment and future learner needs; and
- the opportunity to target support to early school leavers and/or extend support programs beyond school.

Some respondents provided comments on the eligibility regime for government funded training places under the Victorian Training Guarantee. For example, some raised concerns that it may not be in the best interests of a young person to complete a VET-in-Schools qualification if it means they are then less likely to be eligible for a government-funded training place after the age of 20.

In acknowledgement of this, and as a result of a broader consultation process, on 23 September 2010 the Victorian Government announced a \$37.6 million package that includes the following initiatives:

- \$15 million to give every apprentice commencing in 2011 and 2012 access to the Victorian Training Guarantee, regardless of their prior qualifications;
- \$10 million to freeze apprenticeship tuition fees in 2011; and
- In 2011 and 2012, VET certificates completed as part of a senior secondary qualification will not be considered as a “prior qualification” under the Victorian Training Guarantee up-skilling requirement for people aged 20 years and over in the year that they commence another VET qualification.

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

Respondents confirmed the importance of having systems in place that enable students to move effectively between courses, institutions and sectors. Effective articulation arrangements ensure that young people acquire the suite of required knowledge and skills by progressing seamlessly through qualifications and being granted credit where they are eligible.

The discussion paper noted that meeting the range of achievement targets set by the Australian Government and the Council of Australian Governments will require greater rates of articulation from school to VET or higher education, from lower to higher level VET qualifications, and from VET to higher education.

The consultation process highlighted recent innovative arrangements between the school, VET and higher education sectors that enables more students to progress in their education and training journeys. Innovative school-university partnerships, bridging programs and alternative entry pathways are becoming more common.

Innovative Partnerships

Deakin University – Year 13 Program

The program addresses the serious higher education participation and articulation challenges faced by school leavers from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds and those who would not otherwise consider articulating into university or are otherwise ineligible to gain entry into one.

The Deakin Year 13 program will be delivered to students at the school in which they completed Year 12. The program will be the first year of the two-year Deakin Associate Degree of Arts, Business and Sciences. The Associate Degree offers flexibility to allow students to tailor a pathway to suit their career aspirations and interests. It can be studied concurrently with a range of diplomas and provides a supported transition to a number of bachelor degrees, or it can be used as an exit qualification, and is designed to maximise the chance of success for people unfamiliar with tertiary education.

La Trobe University

La Trobe intends to expand access to higher education by introducing alternative entry pathways. The university is currently developing discipline-based diplomas in each faculty, targeted at students who have not received a sufficient Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank or ATAR (formerly ENTER) to enable them to enrol in their course of first preference. These programs will enable successful diploma students to transition into the second year of a wide range of courses, depending on performance.

The TEAP and Tertiary Education Partnerships Program

Opening Doors For All Victorians: The Tertiary Education Access Plan (TEAP)

The TEAP commits the Government to working with higher education providers and schools to develop multilateral agreements to facilitate partnership initiatives aimed at increasing the number of low SES students participating in higher education. A range of strategies will be employed, including:

- raising aspirations for higher education by enabling those from low SES backgrounds, who have successfully pursued higher education and professional careers, to relay their experiences;
- improving students' preparedness for the university learning environment, including through orientation visits;
- raising students' learning achievement to provide more students with the capacity to succeed in higher education; and
- establishing, or scaling up existing transition programs that contribute credit towards students' preferred degrees.

The Government is also supporting partnerships between regional providers through the *Tertiary Education Partnerships Program*. The fund facilitates partnerships between TAFE and higher education providers to enable students to complete, or partially complete, degree level qualifications in areas where higher education access is low. It provides greater flexibility and choice to regional students by improving pathways and options in modes of study, and makes better use of existing infrastructure.

In addition to strengthening partnerships between providers and improving access in regional areas, the importance of credit transfer and the sharing of information across the school, VET and university sectors was a theme that resonated strongly.

The *Tertiary Education Access Plan* commits the Government to working with tertiary institutes and the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority to build on the Qualifications Navigator, creating a web portal that provides learners with information about the relationship between VET qualifications and the recognition of skills and competencies already held. It will also outline possible credits that individuals will receive for different courses by different higher education providers, making it easier for individuals to move through the education and training sectors.

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

"...the pathway to sustainable paid work for those who do not progress to tertiary studies is more precarious than ever, due to technological change and economic pressures associated with globalisation, resulting in the loss of low-paid full-time jobs. The loss of entry-level, secure paid work for young people not moving onto tertiary study has all but eliminated a relatively smooth transition from education to employment for this group."

(submission from the Brotherhood of St Laurence)

"...providing services and programs that equip young people with the necessary skills and confidence to pursue further education and training can help break cycles of disadvantage and dislocation and can prevent a pathway into long term unemployment and exclusion."

(submission from the Melbourne City Mission)

The issues surrounding the existing opportunities for young people to re-engage with education and training generated considerable discussion at the cross sectoral forums, reflecting the commitment of participants to strengthening the way in which our system re-engages young people.

The benefits of early intervention and support through schooling was consistently raised, although it was widely acknowledged that even with the best efforts to keep young people engaged, the circumstances of some young people's lives will mean that re-engagement strategies will always be required.

The particular challenges faced by young people living in rural and remote areas were raised during the consultation process, including;

- the shortage of public transport;
- the distances and costs involved in accessing educational programs which in some cases required moving away from home;
- the limited availability of local educational and work placement options; and
- limited alternatives to mainstream schooling.

Many participants commented that the complex needs of disengaged students means that individualised case-management is necessary. Flexibility in the delivery of services, and a better integrated education and social services system, were cited as measures that would assist in re-engaging young people.

The recently released Victorian Government initiative, *Brighter Futures: Working Together to Improve Services for Young People*, is aimed at addressing some of these issues. The initiative will design and test new ways for the education, youth and family support, justice, homelessness and mental health sectors to work more collaboratively to support young people experiencing problems. Seven demonstration projects will be set up to test and refine these resources on the ground, and trial new approaches to delivering services to make sure young people receive coordinated and holistic support.

Another key service to support young people who are disengaged, or at risk of disengaging, is the Youth Connections program. As part of the National Partnership arrangements, some Commonwealth Government programs for young people including the Youth Pathways program have been consolidated and reconfigured. In Victoria the new Youth Connections program began operating on 1 January 2010 in areas aligned with LLEN service boundaries. At the time of the consultations the service had been operating for about five months.

Respondents expressed strong support for the Youth Connections program, with many calling for further resourcing and expansion of the program, and an increased focus on young people at risk of disengaging. There was also a view that the implementation of the program would benefit from the development of stronger links with schools and other service providers.



Authorised by the Victorian Government.

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