SUBMISSION TO GOVERNMENT PAPER ON YOUTH TRANSITIONS:

There were 5 major themes in this paper. Of these, Melissa and I have focussed our comments for submission on Theme 3: Arrangements to assist completion and Theme 4: Moving between courses, institutions and systems.

Theme: Arrangements to assist completion

Question: What would further strengthen the delivery partnerships between government and non-government schools and between schools and VET providers?

To strengthen the partnerships between schools and VET providers, there needs to be an investigation into the following two points:

1. Cluster Boundaries - Currently our school is on the outer edge of one cluster and the cluster provider of Building construction is on the opposite edge of the boundary. Due to the logistics and practically our students instead attend a closer TAFE provider that is not apart of the cluster. Our main aim is to support the cluster but in this incidence it becomes impossible. This also works in reverse that students from the opposite boundary will not attend our VET Hospitality course on offer.

2. Funding and State-wide role clarification of the VET Cluster Organiser - Having regular contact and updates from the main organiser of the program is vital. As a new careers practitioner I was never contacted by a cluster organiser or told who that was. I had no network of teachers to call upon for support about the VET programs on offer. To promote the programs to my students, I need to fully understand the programs on offer, which is something I believe the cluster organiser needs to promote.

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

TAFE fees reform - This question relates directly to the proposed Government TAFE reforms whereby students who complete a Certificate III at school will then not be eligible for the usual TAFE subsidies if they choose to go on to study a Certificate III course in any other field if they are older than 19 years of age. Therefore our submission is that, if Government is wanting to support young people to complete initial qualifications in the VET sectors, they should ensure all students feel that the choices they make concerning VET courses and initial qualifications (eg, Cert II and Cert III) will not possibly disadvantage them if they later chose to pursue a different field of study. We want our young people to feel encouraged to try out possible areas of interest, not feel afraid to try in case they later change their minds. Students already experiencing difficulties in an initial VET qualification would only have further reasons to consider discontinuing.

In some cases, students may need additional time in order to complete an initial VET qualification and this is something we would seek to encourage if it assists a student to carry on to completion. For instance, many students take a break from formal learning to experience work or travel but this means they would be older when they do finish. This option should not be penalised, yet that is
what the proposed TAFE fees reforms would accomplish – an added disincentive for a student to complete their initial VET qualification.

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

**Additional tuition** - There are many supportive actions that Government could take to support young people to complete initial qualifications in the VET sector. These could include tutoring available for various specific subject areas as well as in study skills in general, to assist with the theoretical aspects of their qualification. Students would benefit if they were able to receive free tutoring in areas they are weak in. Many TAFEs and Universities provide theses services to students so it would be great if Government funded this to occur in schools as well.

**The importance of EQ and general life skills, not just Numeracy and Literacy Skills** - A further supportive strategy could be the provision of training in general life skills that would assist young people in managing their schooling. For example, communication skills, assertiveness, time management, etc. One of the major themes this Discussion Paper looks at is Literacy and Numeracy, whereas it is just as important to focus on the development of these crucial life skills as well as the development of Literacy and Numeracy skills if we are to succeed in equipping students to complete qualifications. This Discussion Paper quotes the research that shows that greater skills in Literacy and Numeracy skills lead to greater rates of completion of qualifications. However, has research looked into the correlation of other important life skills (such as those named above) on rates of completion? Emotional Intelligence is also a critical aspect of overall intelligence and one which would impact on a student’s ability to complete a qualification. Research could also look at this as a cause of failure to complete qualifications. Surely if the Government provided students with tutoring and support in becoming more skilled in these areas, more students would go on to complete qualifications. Where this would also help completion rates may be in the greater confidence given to students, particularly those less academically able, as the Government would be officially acknowledging the importance and equal value of all types of intelligences, not just academic intelligence.

**Flexible VCE provision** - A strategy introduced here at Eltham College is to offer students who are at risk of disengaging from schooling, the opportunity to “fast track” their studies so that they can complete the VCE in two years after completing Year 9 rather than the usual three years. This offers added incentives to students who may otherwise feel despondent about staying on at school for a further three years. We invite them to begin VCE studies at the Unit 1/2 level – both academic and vocational – in Year 10 so that they are then eligible to complete the required number of Units 3/4 for VCE completion the following year. This option is further served by ensuring a broad curriculum and in particular offering VET subjects as well as Foundation English and Foundation Maths subjects, which maximises the opportunity for these students to complete their VCE.

**Heavy promotion of an ‘Unscored VCE’** - Not many schools promote this as an option for their students. Having worked in two completely different schools - one that promoted this option
and one that didn’t - I have noticed a difference in the completion rates. The school where promotion of an unscored VCE was never mentioned meant that students would drop out of school not completing their VCE and instead look for a trade or at TAFE options. In the school that promotes this option, many students realise the value of completing their VCE and they can relax and be more confident in their own ability to go on and successfully complete the VCE. This is especially true where the program of studies includes both academic and vocational subject choices. These students are more at ease at school knowing they do not have to complete exams.

The student completing an unscored VCE will not obtain an ENTER (now called ATAR) score, however there are many alternative pathways for them to enter tertiary education if they so choose. Besides, as this Discussion Paper states, research currently indicates that selection based on the ENTER scores is a weak indicator of student success in higher education courses for students with ENTERs below 80.

**THEME: MOVING BETWEEN COURSES, INSTITUTIONS AND SYSTEMS**

**Question:** 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?

We do not feel that efforts to improve VET to higher education articulation and credit arrangements should focus on particular occupational pathways and skill priority areas. This is because it would introduce negative pressures on young people when they are making choices about which initial qualifications they may undertake, similar to the way the new TAFE fees reforms would. That is, students should be encouraged to select courses based on their own interests and skills, and not be put off by the prospect that their selected course may not have the same scope of occupational pathways or possible accreditation options as other courses. Providing particular areas with superior occupational pathways and credit arrangements may lead to more forced choices by young people into those areas of skill priority, which would then increase the risk of young people later disengaging and dropping out of these courses.

An unintended consequence of focussing efforts on particular occupations and skill priority areas would also be the message to young people that not all areas of interest and skill are valued equally and this, in turn, could lead to a lowering in confidence by young people concerning their abilities and the choices they would like to make. Career advice to young people should always focus them on pursuing pathways in their own areas of interest and they should be able to do so in full confidence that there will be full, not limited, occupational pathways and opportunities for credit arrangements.

**Question:** How can governments ensure that reforms to the VET and higher education sector address both skill needs and student demand for particular qualifications?
No penalties for choices made in the school years - Any reforms to the VET sector need to ensure that students are not penalised later in life for any decision about studies done whilst completing schooling. Studies done at school need to be exempt from the proposed ‘Skills Reform’.

Provide more places in courses - The Government also needs to ensure that in order to address student demands, more funding needs to be available for the TAFE/Universities to have places available for the high amount of students wanting to study in certain fields. For example, the interest from students in the areas of Medicine, Law and ParaMedicine far outweigh the number of places available. This seems a particular problem given the particular shortages, such as in medical health fields in rural areas.

Additional incentives - Government could perhaps look at other methods of attracting young people into skill priority areas, such as various payment incentives, etc.