



## Submission to the Inquiry into School to Work Transition

The Brotherhood of St Laurence welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's new inquiry into the School to Work Transition. The Brotherhood holds deep knowledge about the supports and conditions that all young people need to navigate the transition from school to work. This expertise is based on research and evaluations conducted by our Research and Policy Centre on the interrelated issues of work, vocational education and training, school engagement and attainment, and employer partnerships. Importantly our understanding is also grounded in our long experience developing and delivering services for young people who, for both structural and individual reasons, struggle to make this transition. Strategic partnerships with government, business and the community are key to our approach with young people. Currently we work with:

- **Early school leavers**, through the *Navigator* and *Reconnect* programs (funded by the Victorian Department of Education), our independent school (*the David Scott School*) for young people who have disengaged from mainstream schooling
- **Young people experiencing homelessness**, through the *Education First Youth Foyers* (funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHSS) and Department of Education)
- **Young people who are in out of home care settings**, through delivery of the *Certificate 1 in Developing Independence in state funded Out of Home Care Pilot* (funded by DHHS)
- **Young people who are newly arrived migrants**, through the *Youth Transitions Support Pilot* (funded by the federal Department of Social Services)
- **Young people who are unemployed**, through the *Transition to Work* service (funded by the federal Department of Employment)
- **Young people living in public housing** through *Work and Learning Centres* (funded by DHHS)

Through our research, evaluations, service design and delivery we have identified the range of economic, social, institutional and individual factors that conspire to make this transition more difficult for young people today. We have also identified key principles as well as the essential program design elements for effecting successful school to work transitions for all young people and especially those who experience disadvantage.

Our submission briefly outlines the Brotherhood's understanding of the key, evidence-informed features of good practice in this field. We focus our response on the second and third terms of reference: opportunities to better inform and support students in relation to post-school education and training, and other relevant matters.

## Principles for effective school to work transitions

### Creating successful STW transitions for young people

1. is a **whole of community responsibility** requiring access to the resources and complementary expertise of government (state, federal and local), business/industry, community organisations, families and young people themselves
2. **requires integrated policy work across policy and program portfolios** including higher education and vocational education and training, secondary education, and human services
3. **requires tailored responses** to young people that combine information with experiential learning opportunities
4. involves recognising young people as **capable, resourceful and motivated** and enabling them to thrive through positive investment in their talents and capabilities
5. includes providing young people with **agency over decisions** that affect their future, to develop their self-confidence and motivation to pursue employment goals relevant to their skills and aspirations
6. requires **evidence-informed design** of service responses grounded in practice experience and ongoing data collection to enable adaptive learning.

## Youth employment – the importance of vocational guidance

In the modern economy that emphasises skills and workplace experience, the transition from school to work can be problematic for all young people, and particularly so for young people experiencing disadvantage. Young people often have little knowledge of the vocational options available, lack insight into their natural aptitudes, have an inadequate knowledge of employer expectations, and lack rudimentary vocational skills. In short, many are simply not ready for what is expected of them in the work place. In addition, much of the current public assistance does not provide a realistic ‘line of sight’ to a job that engenders hope, motivation and confidence. The inadequacy of the public policy and service responses to this reality is demonstrated in the large numbers of disadvantaged young people who are not successfully engaging with education and/or work, or are not gaining the skills, experiences and networks they need to build a career path.<sup>1</sup>

Our experience working with young people experiencing disadvantage who are struggling to transition from school to work has highlighted the importance of high quality vocational guidance that provides a line of sight to employment. This enables young people to identify their skills and talents and match them with the industry and occupation where they are best suited. Quality vocational guidance recognises the young person’s strengths and aspirations as well as the local labour market, and incorporates opportunities to explore a range of careers through experiential learning.<sup>2</sup>

We acknowledge that regular feedback enables students to identify areas for development and the supports they need to improve in these areas. At an institutional level, schools are able to identify

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<sup>1</sup>Brown, D with James, S, Mallett, S, McTiernan, N, Orchard, N & Cull, E 2017, *Transition to Work Community of Practice: Practice Guide*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne; Buick, J, Mallett, S & James, S 2014, *Education First Youth Foyer Employment Offer Conceptual Framework*, Hanover Welfare Services and Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, D with James, S, Mallett, S, McTiernan, N, Orchard, N & Cull, E 2017, *Transition to Work Community of Practice: Practice Guide*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

extra resource requirements. In addition, employment outcomes data in relation to vocational and higher education pathways can help young people assess potential career prospects, although providing this information in isolation is problematic, given that other factors apart from course selection affect employment outcomes. Information alone is insufficient to achieve successful school to work transitions.

### Limitations of the current offer

Evidence indicates that vocational guidance should start as early as possible, embedded progressively in the secondary school curriculum, and tailored to the young person's developmental stage, needs and circumstances.<sup>3</sup> Lessons can be garnered from nations such as Switzerland, Germany, Austria and South Korea, which offer integrated school and work-based learning, professional in-school vocational guidance, well-resourced, quality school-based vocational options catering to diverse needs, and high level multi-sectoral engagement, particularly partnerships with industry and the employment sector.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this, available research in Australia reveals that:<sup>5</sup>

- Students have limited access to careers information until late in their schooling, often in the context of Year 11 and 12 subject selection and completion
- Many school careers teachers lack current knowledge of local industries and the range of employment opportunities available to young people
- Schools often do not place a high priority on engagement with industry among all the other demands they face
- Careers teachers need regular industry exposure, as well as the time and resources to attend relevant professional development activities
- Careers teachers may have limited industry experience themselves and often advocate university as a first option rather than encourage pursuit of alternative pathways
- The vocational education and training (VET) system is complex, making it difficult for parents and students to navigate
- Despite the fact that young people rely on their parents as a key source of information when planning their career paths, parents are insufficiently informed and therefore limited in their ability to provide guidance
- Students are rarely provided with opportunities to experiment with different vocational options before committing to a course or other career pathway

The limitations of our current system are compounded for young people who are experiencing disadvantage, who lack family support or capacity and/or who are disconnected from the education system. Career guidance, work experience, school-based apprenticeships and traineeships and

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<sup>3</sup> Nous Group 2014, *DEECD School-Industry Engagement Project with LLENs and WLCs*, Nous Group, Melbourne.

<sup>4</sup> OECD 2011, *Learning for jobs – pointers for policy development*, Directorate for Education, Education and Training Policy Division, OECD Publishing, Paris.

<sup>5</sup> Borlagdan, J, & Peyton, K 2014, *A conversation that never stops: an indicative study of the Parents as Career Transition Support program*, Brotherhood of St Laurence and Melbourne Institute, Melbourne.

structured workplace learning programs are largely delivered in or from school settings.<sup>6</sup> Young people who leave school early are, therefore, unlikely to benefit from these standard supports. A range of supplementary support programs and services exist to support young people who sit outside of or on the periphery of the education system, such as the state-funded *Reconnect* and *Navigator* programs, *Local Learning and Employment Networks*, and on a smaller scale Bendigo Kangan Institute's *Next Steps* program. However, access to these programs is not universal and there are significant variations to outcomes for different groups of young people.<sup>7</sup> Many students who leave school early also leave home early and therefore miss out on family support including connection to networks, the development of social and relationship skills, and positive identity under the guidance of supportive role models.<sup>8</sup>

### An Advantaged Thinking practice approach

The Brotherhood uses the concept of Advantaged Thinking to direct the way we work with young people. Advantaged Thinking recognises that all young people can make a vital contribution to our society, so all should have access to the opportunities and social networks that facilitate their social and economic participation. It represents a shift in the way we think about young people experiencing disadvantage: rather than investing in these young people's problems, Advantaged Thinking moves towards identifying, developing and most importantly investing in their skills, capabilities and assets in order to co-create solutions to enable them to achieve independent adulthood.<sup>9</sup> This approach is embedded in the four key elements discussed below.

### Effective programs and practice for successful school to work transition

Both the Brotherhood's service delivery experience and relevant literature have highlighted the need for an improved offer, combining four key elements considered essential for young people to navigate the transition from school to work.<sup>10</sup> These are:

- vocational guidance
- co-designed planning
- skills and capabilities building
- real world opportunities.

Together, these four elements constitute a suite of activities and opportunities that equip young people with the skills, experiences, networks and support necessary to gain sustainable employment.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cull, E, Mallett, S & James, S 2014, *Education First Youth Foyer Education Offer Conceptual Framework*, Hanover Welfare Services and Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne; Buick, J., Mallett, S. & James, S. 2014, *Education First Youth Foyer Employment Offer Conceptual Framework*, Hanover Welfare Services and Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Hanson-Peterson, J, Cull, E, Mallett, S. & James, S 2014, *Education First Youth Foyer Social Connections Offer Conceptual Framework*, Hanover Welfare Services and Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

<sup>9</sup> Mallett, S, James, S, McTiernan, N & Buick, J 2014, *Education First Youth Foyer Practice Framework*, Hanover Welfare Services and Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

<sup>10</sup> Borland, J, Considine, M, Kalb, G & Ribar, D 2016, *What are best-practice programs for jobseekers facing high barriers to employment?*, Melbourne Institute policy briefs no. 4/16, Melbourne Institute, Melbourne; OECD 2012, *Activating Job seekers: how Australia does it*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

### *Vocational guidance*

Young people require exposure to, and information about, a wide range of industries and careers, as well as about their education and training requirements so they can develop realistic career plans that match their interests, skills and abilities with areas of opportunity. A key part of this is access to experiential learning opportunities, through which young people can explore workplaces and meet employers and industry experts, coupled with locally informed guidance on navigating employment and education systems. This is particularly important for young people who lack the networks provided through family, positive peer relationships, school and community. Vocational guidance needs to be ongoing and focused on the young person's immediate employment goals as well as their long-term career aspirations.

### *Co-designed planning*

Vocational guidance alone is not sufficient to assist young people through the transition from school to work. Young people need to be supported to identify both their career goals and the concrete actions and responsibilities they must meet to achieve these goals. Many young people with family support have ongoing, informal discussions about career options and pathways. Those without family networks do not have the same emotional support and assistance with things such as goal setting and decision making, as well as access to networks and connections.

Young people require assistance to develop and enact personal visions and goals, providing them with agency and self-direction about their future career. This has been found to lead to a deeper and more sustained engagement in education, training and employment. Too often, however, young people experiencing disadvantage do not have agency over their pathway, or what it is they are doing. Co-designing a plan with a young person enables them to develop realistic plans that match their interests, skills and abilities with areas of opportunity. Through the planning process, the young person identifies their talents and skills, their informal prior learning and areas that need further development. This facilitates the development of agency and self-confidence, as well as practical planning and goal-setting skills.

### *Skills and capabilities building*

In addition to opportunities, networks and resources, young people need to build key skills, assets, attributes and character capabilities to make the transition to adulthood. These skills are necessary to take advantage of opportunities to participate in education, in work and in the broader community, particularly for young people who are disconnected from education and work.

Employability skills focus on the personal, social and transferable qualities that are relevant to all jobs, as opposed to specific technical skills or qualifications. Employers continually rank these skills – along with foundational or functional expertise in language, literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology – as just as important to getting and keeping a job as technical skills and qualifications.

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<sup>11</sup> Brown, D with James, S, Mallett, S, McTiernan, N, Orchard, N & Cull, E 2017, *Transition to Work Community of Practice: Practice Guide*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

With the growth of precarious and rapidly changing conditions in the workplace, it is also imperative that young people are equipped with skills for career management and maintenance, such as with job seeking, résumé and application writing, interviewing, goal setting, planning and decision making.

#### *Real world opportunities*

A critical aspect of moving young people into work is increasing their exposure to the world of work, and their experience in real workplaces. Through these opportunities, young people are able to learn about workplaces and vocations, test their work-readiness in an area of employment relevant to their career goals, receive authentic feedback in a supportive environment, and critically reflect on their learning before they transition to employment or further study.

Work experience and work tasters assist young people to find out more about the day-to-day activities of particular jobs, broadens their knowledge about the types of activities, positions and career structures in a range of industries, and alerts them to any associated educational requirements. These opportunities also enable young people to build their social capital through networks and connections with employers and their community, and to develop their own employer and community contacts upon which they can draw.

While this submission presents only a snapshot of some complexities faced and potential interventions required to support young Australians to navigate the transition from school to work, the Brotherhood would welcome the opportunity to elaborate on this in front of the committee.

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