



Brotherhood
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

Submission to the Education Council Review of Senior Secondary Pathways

Brotherhood of St Laurence

December 2019

The BSL and pathways for young people

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is an independent non-government organisation with strong community links that has been working to reduce poverty in Australia since the 1930s. Based in Melbourne, but with a national profile, the Brotherhood continues to fight for an Australia free of poverty. We undertake research, service development and delivery, and advocacy with the objective of addressing unmet needs and translating the understandings gained into new policies, new programs and practices for implementation by government and others.

Relevant to senior secondary pathways, we work with:

- young people who have experienced disrupted education, through our David Scott School which delivers the Victorian Certificate in Applied Learning to over 120 students
- early school leavers, through the Navigator and Reconnect programs (funded by the Victorian Department of Education)
- 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 and justice attached settings through delivery of the Certificate 1 in Developing Independence (funded by the Victorian Government)
- 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, and as host of the National Youth Employment Body (both funded by the federal Department of Employment). The BSL leads a Community of Practice of TtW providers committed to shared practice, research and evidence
- young people living in public housing, through Work and Learning Centres (funded by DHHS).

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Recommendations summary

Overhaul careers exploration and guidance

1. Establish a network of vocational exploration and guidance hubs, linked to the National Careers Institute, to assist young people and their families
2. Start careers exploration early—from Year 7—and embed it in a wide range of subjects
3. Support young people, whether in or out of school, to develop and maintain an education and career plan linked to their aspirations, interests and talents
4. Increase investment in specialist careers advisors
5. Equip teachers and trainers to support career conversations and foster project-based learning

Lift the quality and status of vocational education

6. Foster a strong public vocational education system, which is distinct from and complementary to the competitive training market
7. Overhaul VET in Schools so that it provides an effective pathway into higher-level study or work.
 - Make the links with further training and higher education options more explicit and multi-directional.
 - Extend pre-apprenticeship programs in school settings.
 - Increase the availability of models that enable young people to engage in employment and training, while remaining engaged in schools.
 - Equip training providers and schools to support the learning and wellbeing needs of young people experiencing disadvantage.
8. Task the National Careers Institute with promoting vocational education as a valued pathway and resource them to do so.

Improve outcomes for young people experiencing disadvantage

9. Establish system-wide measures and targets to lift outcomes across a broad range of equity groups in school, further and higher education settings. Monitor and report on performance against these targets.
10. Strengthen support for vulnerable secondary students by:
 - Engaging Youth Coaches to support the educational journey of highly vulnerable young people

- **Equipping schools to operate as community hubs in locations of high disadvantage. These would be designed to advance the circumstances of students, their families and the local community.**
 - **Extending the availability of high support flexible learning options for young people who are estranged from, or not able to cope in, conventional schools.**
- 11. Recast support for young people experiencing homelessness to include a primary focus on engagement with education or training, inspired by models such as TAFE-based Education First Youth Foyers.**
 - 12. Enable TAFE Institutes and community education providers (with a demonstrated track record) to better support the needs of students experiencing disadvantage—through a modified Community Service Obligation or needs-based funding.**
 - 13. Apply a sharp and urgent focus to lifting pathways outcomes for young people with disability, including through national roll-out of the Ticket to Work initiative.**

Adopt a coordinated and consistent approach to the development of 'soft skills'

- 14. Embed a consistent approach to the development of soft skills across senior secondary and VET curricula and syllabi. Accord significant value to these in progress towards formal qualifications.**

Overview

The Brotherhood of St Laurence welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Education Council's Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training.

This submission draws on the Brotherhood's deep understanding of the supports and conditions that young Australians need to navigate the transition from school to work. We have a long history of research and evaluations into the related issues of work, vocational education and training, school engagement and attainment, and employer partnerships. We also have long experience in developing and delivering services for young people who, for both structural and individual reasons, struggle to make this transition. Strategic partnerships with educators, employers, industry bodies, governments and the community are key to our approach.

Our submission focuses on the senior secondary pathways experiences of young people experiencing disadvantage—including those from lower income households, living in locations of disadvantage, experiencing disability, with low English language proficiency, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. There is a stark gap in terms of school engagement, educational attainment and uptake of further and higher education between young people experiencing disadvantage and their peers. Just over 60% of young people from the lowest SES group achieve Year 12 or equivalent in contrast to almost 90% of their peers at the other end of the SES scale. While less than half of all young people go on to attend university, just a quarter of those in the lowest SES quintile do. Vocational education and training is *the* major gateway to skills, qualifications and employment for young people experiencing disadvantage. However, VET participation rates of equity groups are going backwards.

Key challenges, which are well understood, include the following:

- **Opportunities for vocational exploration and guidance are patchy, too late and often inadequate.** The consequences—limited knowledge of vocational options, poor choices and high drops-out rates from training—are compounded for young people who are experiencing disadvantage, who lack family support or capacity and/or who are disconnected from the education system.
- **Schools are not catering for the needs and interests of all students.** When tech schools were largely abandoned in favour of the comprehensive school model, the curriculum, structure and approach were not fundamentally changed to reflect this quantum shift. For many, the quest for a high ATAR is a demoralising and alienating experience.

Year 12 retention rates stubbornly stuck at around 80% indicate that schools are not catering for a sizeable proportion of young people. Those that have not attained Year 12 or equivalent by age 25 are highly unlikely to ever recover their education. The chances of early school leavers building a sustainable livelihood is greatly diminished.

- **Many schools are very focused on entry to university** yet most young people do not end up at this destination, or make their way to higher education via different post-school pathways. VET is positioned as the poor relation—both culturally and financially—in Australia's educational landscape.

- **Australia's VET system suffers significant shortcomings** which impact on the appeal of vocational options. Marketisation has resulted in waste, reduced quality and diminished trust across the system. TAFE Institutes—a key destination for young people—have been badly damaged. Industry-driven competency-based training has narrowed learning and is not delivering the occupational proficiency or workforce adaptability needed in the contemporary labour market. The system is fragmented, and difficult to navigate.

VET training products have been dropped into schools, but are frequently not fit for purpose—and many employers do not accept school-based delivery as equivalent to on-the-job training.

Despite the vast and urgent need for more people with Certificates III and IV, **VET enrolments are falling**—including a **massive decline in apprentices and trainees**.

- **Emerging skill requirements are difficult to identify, foster and assess.** All education systems are struggling to develop sought-after non-technical skills, such as adaptability, collaboration and problem-solving.
- **Support for young people living in challenging circumstances to stay engaged with education and training is poor.** We work with many young people facing significant obstacles: literacy and numeracy, physical and mental health, housing stability, social connectedness, safety and security (e.g. from family violence), caring responsibilities, personal finances and income, and familial attitudes to education. They will likely receive support from various services—schools, training providers, employment support services, local governments, Centrelink and community organisations. However, there is a desperate lack of coordination across these services, which must comply with differing expectations and imperatives. Sustained support and continuity of support are rare.

We recommend change on many fronts. Genuine progress for young people is achievable only through a combination of reforms, including:

Overhauling vocational exploration and careers guidance so that young people are well equipped to develop aspirations; identify their strengths and talents; and understand, try out and navigate options. Alongside reforms to school-based careers exploration and guidance, we call for the establishment of a **network of vocational exploration and guidance hubs**, linked to the National Careers Institute, to assist young people and their families. These hubs should be located on TAFE campuses (and potentially in other high traffic areas), leveraging existing infrastructure and linking education and training, youth services and other community supports and resources.

Rebuilding trust and quality in vocational training is pivotal to making VET an attractive pathway and meeting Australia's workforce needs. To achieve this, Australia needs a strong public vocation education system, which is distinct from and complementary to the competitive training market. There is significant opportunity to harness and reorient Australia's network of TAFEs. They ought to have a distinctive role and be accountable to deliver public good outcomes and public value. TAFEs need to be geared to underpin excellence in education design and delivery, partner with industry to address workforce needs, and drive local alignment between skill and training offerings, related support services, other education providers and employers.

Efforts to **reform VET in Schools** need to continue so that it is not delivering a second-rate qualification. Key improvements include increasing access to real world workplace learning, extending pre-apprenticeship programs and flexible models to enable young people to engage in training and paid employment while also remaining engaged in school.

Alongside real quality improvements is the need to **lift the status and image of vocational education and training**. We welcome the newly established National Careers Institute, which could play a pivotal role in this regard.

Improving outcomes for young people experiencing disadvantage must be at the front and centre of the work of this review. Australia has been tardy in adopting system-wide measures and targets to lift outcomes across equity groups in school, further and higher education settings. Dissolution of the former COAG Reform Council and the National VET Equity Advisory Council have reduced the focus on equity outcomes. We put forward tangible options to support vulnerable students to complete their schooling and for TAFE and community training providers to better support students experiencing disadvantage.

The Brotherhood uses the concept of **Advantaged Thinking** to direct the way we work with young people—a concept that could be adopted more broadly as an underpinning approach. Advantaged Thinking recognises all young people—regardless of their circumstances—have strengths, talents and potential and can make a vital contribution to our society if given the right opportunities. It moves towards identifying, developing and most importantly investing in young people’s skills, capabilities and assets.

Finally, we call for a coherent and intentional focus on the **development of soft skills** in schooling and training. Young people need to be well equipped to adjust to and navigate the changing economy. Strengthening core capabilities and developing transferable skills—not just technical skills—are essential for sustained social and economic participation.

Recommendations for reform

Overhaul careers exploration and guidance

Many young people lack knowledge about vocational options

Our research and practice highlight a number of challenges facing young people when considering their futures.¹ We find that young people often have little knowledge of the vocational options available and lack insight into their natural aptitudes. At the same time, many have inadequate knowledge of employer expectations, and are simply not ready for what is expected of them in the workplace, making it difficult to secure a job. This is particularly the case for those experiencing disadvantage, as they are more likely to lack the necessary social capital—resources, networks and access to support—to navigate Australia’s changing labour market.

Specific challenges from the perspective of students include:

- Students have limited access to careers information until late in their schooling, often in the context of VCE subject selection.
- Middle-years students often have little exposure to information about vocational and further education options.
- Although young people rely on their parents as a key source of information when planning their career paths, parents are limited in their ability to provide guidance.
- Young people are rarely provided with opportunities to experiment with different vocational options before committing to a course or other career pathway.
- Schools often do not place a high priority on students’ engagement with industry.

Challenges relating to career advisors in schools include:

- Many school careers teachers lack current knowledge of local industries and the range of employment opportunities available to young people.
- Careers teachers need more industry exposure, as well as the time and resources to attend relevant professional development activities.
- Careers teachers, with limited experience of other sectors often advocate university as a first option rather than encouraging pursuit of alternative pathways.

Challenges relating to the VET sector include:

- The vocational education and training system is too complex, making it difficult for parents and students to navigate.

¹J Borlagdan & K Peyton 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; G Myconos, E Dommers, K Clarke 2018, *Viewed from the margins: navigating disadvantage and VET*, in Vocational education for the 21st century: a series of policy discussion papers, LH Martin Institute, the University of Melbourne; E Dommers, G Myconos, L Swain, S Yung, & K Clarke 2017, *Engaging young early school leavers in vocational training*, NCVER, Adelaide; G Myconos, K Clarke & K te Riele 2016, *Shedding light: private ‘for profit’ training providers and young early school leavers*, NCVER, Adelaide.

- Many young people are taking up accredited training with little or no understanding of their career options, or of the conditions and type of work required in different industries. This can lead to disillusionment and early drop-out.

Challenges caused by the absence of post school assistance include:

- Young people who leave school early are unlikely to benefit from career guidance and work experience, which is largely delivered from school settings.
- While supplementary support programs and services do exist to support young people who sit outside or on the periphery of the education system², access is not universal and outcomes vary considerably between groups.
- Many 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.³

Young people need to be equipped to navigate vocational options

Careers exploration should start as early as possible, be embedded progressively in the secondary school curriculum, and be tailored to the young person's developmental stage, needs and circumstances.⁴ It should be available both in and out of the school setting, and include opportunities for family participation, as young people are diverse and respond very differently to both the message and source. Inspiration can be taken 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 through partnerships with employers.⁵

The Brotherhood have put into practice through our programs four key elements we consider essential for young people to navigate the transition from school to work: vocational guidance, co-design of planning; skills and capabilities building, and real world opportunities (see diagram below).^{6 7} These inform our recommendations.

² For example, in Victoria the state-funded Reconnect and Navigator programs, Local Learning and Employment Networks, and, on a smaller scale, Bendigo Kangan Institute's Next Steps program

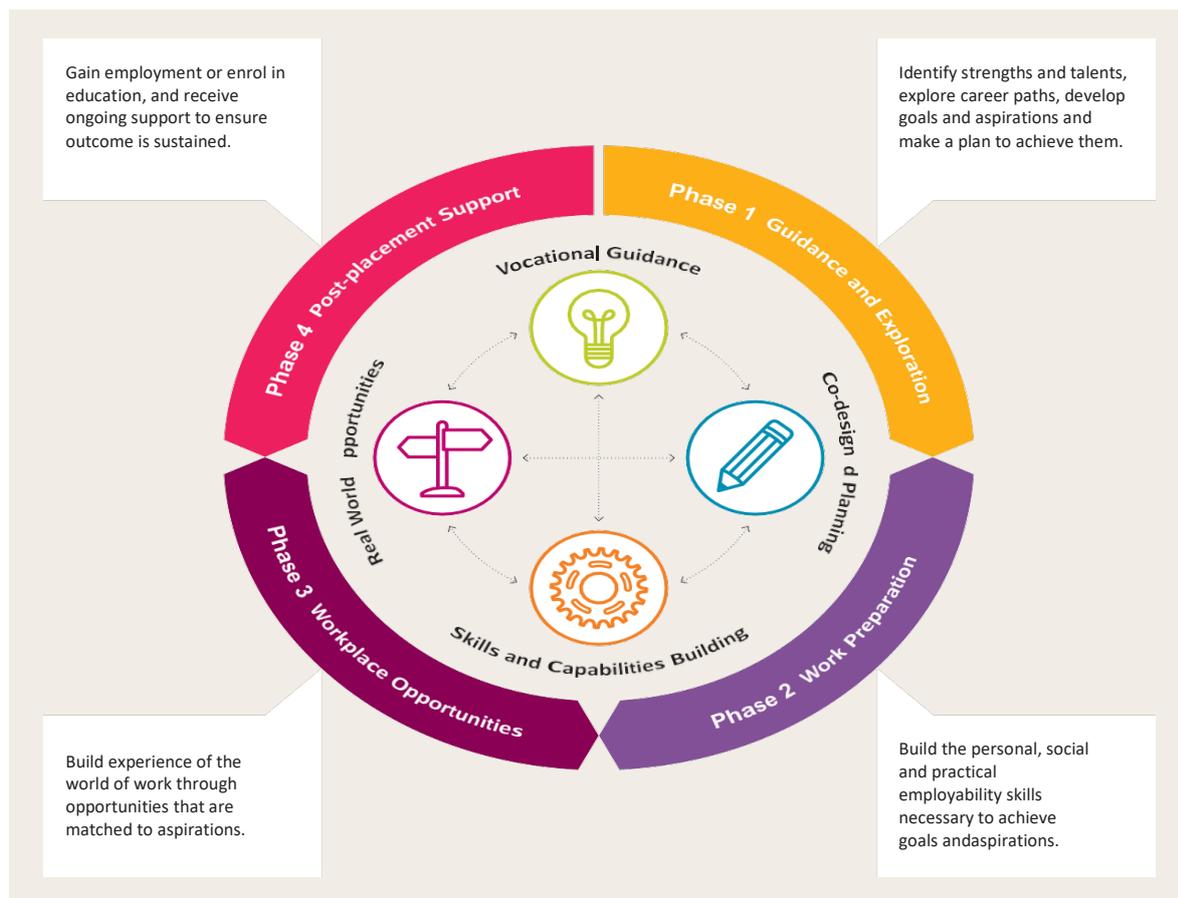
³ Cull, E, Mallett, S & James, S 2014, *Education First Youth Foyer Education Offer Conceptual Framework*, Hanover Welfare Services and Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne; Buick, J., Mallet, S. & James, S. 2014, *Education First Youth Foyer Employment Offer Conceptual Framework*, Hanover Welfare Services and Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

⁴ Nous Group 2014, *DEECD School-Industry Engagement Project with LLENs and WLCs*, Nous Group, Melbourne.

⁵ OECD 2011, *Learning for jobs – pointers for policy development*, Directorate for Education, Education and Training Policy Division, OECD Publishing, Paris.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.



We use the concept of Advantaged Thinking to direct the way we work with young people to co-create solutions to achieve independent adulthood.⁸ This approach recognises all young people have strengths, talents and potential and can make a vital contribution to our society if given the right opportunities. Advantaged Thinking moves towards identifying, developing and most importantly investing in young people’s skills, capabilities and assets.

Australia needs a network of vocational exploration and guidance hubs located in TAFEs and other high traffic areas tailored to the needs of young people.

Access to high-quality, independent vocational guidance and exploration is essential for young people to make informed decisions about their pathway choices—yet outside school there is little available in many parts of the country, other than online platforms. In the context of Australia’s considerable investment in vocational and higher education, such hubs would be a modest cost that could be offset by the better completion rates and labour market satisfaction that are likely to flow from informed decision making. We believe that vulnerable groups would benefit greatly from individualised support to navigate their options.

The hubs would provide face-to-face service, backed by online and phone support that operates independently of training providers. They could be part of the National Careers Institute. They would be open to all young people and their families—whether in or out of school, or thinking

⁸ Mallett, S, James, S, McTiernan, N & Buick, J 2014, *Education First Youth Foyer Practice Framework*, Hanover Welfare Services and Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

about vocational or higher education. Hub services would also be available to schools and training providers to supplement their in-house careers guidance efforts.

These Hubs should be established on TAFE campuses across the country to provide tailored support for prospective young learners (aged up to 25 years), linking education, employment, youth service systems and other community supports and resources. They could leverage existing infrastructure. For example, in Victoria they could build on the existing TAFE based Skills and Jobs Centres and be connected to Local Learning and Employment Networks.

Key elements Vocational Exploration and Guidance Hubs	
Links with schools and trade training centres	Working with secondary schools and trade training centres to facilitate work experience and volunteer work, and promote better work integrated learning opportunities with employers
Early school leavers outreach	Identification and tailored engagement of early school leavers
Coherent, connected ACE and VET offerings	Co-location and/or co-delivery of programs and services that provide students, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, with access to ACE providers and interest-based learning,
Connections to support services	Connections to TAFE student support and external services e.g. mental health, youth justice, settlement, housing, employment
Vocational guidance and pathway navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced pathways through education systems and levels – school, pre-accredited training, accredited qualifications and higher education. Skilled and ongoing pathway planning and career development, and support for navigating the VET and university system, particularly at the point of access, enrolment and initial engagement.
Learning assessment and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertaking LLN and other relevant assessments to identify students with significant learning needs to inform pathway planning purposes Connecting young people to courses and educational settings that are relevant to their learning needs and which will build their capacity for ongoing engagement and participation.
Employer and industry connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessing real world employment opportunities including work exposure and experience, work placements to support training Workforce planning
Evidence-informed, action learning which connects regional learning with national policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A national Community of Practice would foster shared practice, learnings, innovations and develop a shared evidence base. The Hubs are part of, or connected to, the National Careers Institute.

Inspiration can be taken from the KIOSC Model, which incorporates some of the elements outlined above.

The KIOSC Model

The Knox Innovation, Opportunity and Sustainability Centre (KIOSC) is a good example of a hub-like model that leverages partnerships with the Local Learning & Employment Network, several schools, Swinburne University of Technology/TAFE, registered training organizations, local government and local businesses to expose young people to vocational learning.

KIOSC was established in 2012 under the Australian Government Trade Training Centres in Schools (TTC) program as a partnership between the Knox Consortium of Secondary Schools and Swinburne University of Technology.

KIOSC has a specific focus on STEM emphasising project and theme based learning for years 7-10 using contemporary themed areas ('Inspired Technology', Genetics, Design Thinking, Geo-mapping, Food Future, Forensic Science, and Energy and Geo-Hazards). This links to the Tertiary Aspirations Programs for year 10 students, which in turn links to STEM related VCE programs. (<https://www.kiosc.vic.edu.au/about-us/>)

Careers exploration and vocational guidance need to start early

Starting careers exploration early—from Year 7—is critical to stronger transitions outcomes. 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.

Vocational guidance needs to be ongoing and pay attention to both the young person's immediate goals and their long-term career aspirations.

The importance of such exploration before significantly narrowing options and committing to accredited vocational training cannot be understated.

We see opportunity to modify curriculum to include vocational exploration opportunities attached to all subjects, including those commonly undertaken in the early years of secondary schooling such as music; food and nutrition; design; and graphics.

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 is critical.

Planning and goal setting are important

Young people need to be actively involved in developing and enacting personal visions and goals, enabling them to gain a sense of self-direction about their future. This has been found to lead to a deeper, sustained engagement in education, training and employment. Through the planning process, the young person identifies their talents and skills, their informal prior learning and areas that need further development. This fosters agency and self-confidence, as well as practical planning and goal-setting skills.

Co-development and maintenance of education and career plans ought to be embedded in curriculum for all secondary school aged young people—whether in school or training.

We note some states are moving towards this. Victoria, for example, is rolling out Career Action Plans which support young people, from Year 7 onwards, to consider their futures with direct reference to their aspirations, interests and talents. While young people have ‘ownership’, staff, parents, family and trusted community members can also contribute.⁹

Skilled and resourced careers advisors are needed

Careers advice, as a field of expertise, must adapt to assisting younger people whose views, preferences and aspirations are not yet fully formed or articulated. The role of career advisor in the school setting must be accorded greater status and, most importantly, the resources needed to adequately prepare young people for the future. We draw on findings from various government reviews and peak bodies that have recommended:

- providing more time: that is, adjust the school staff mix to include more full-time advisors, and ensure that more of the working day is dedicated to career advice and not shared across other duties¹⁰
- increasing funds: to cover increased time allocation, advisor materials, and travel for professional development and industry engagement.¹¹
- upskilling school career staff: through better resourced training.¹²

Educators and trainers need to be better equipped for career conversations

Teachers and trainers of young people need to be familiarised with processes and resources that can assist young people and their families to contemplate and plan for the post-secondary school experience. Teacher training programs could incorporate more pre-vocational and vocational training basics—e.g. by making vocational-oriented instruction a part of regular teacher training; and by streamlining the formal requirements needed to qualify to teach VET in schools.¹³

Project-based learning supports young people’s interests

Project and interest-based learning that prompts exploration of future pathways should be encouraged from an early age. Projects can introduce future thinking, and build awareness of various post school pathways. Projects involve sustained work over time and connections outside the classroom. As career inclinations emerge, the teacher can assist students to explore the skills

⁹ Victorian Department of Education and Training 2019, *Career action plans*,

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/carframe/Pages/cap.aspx>.

¹⁰ The Career Industry Council of Australia 2017, *Equipping the next generation in and increasingly complex environment*, <https://cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/CICA-Media-Release-3-May-2017.pdf>

¹¹ The Career Industry Council of Australia 2017.

¹² Parliament of Victoria, Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee 2018, *Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools*, report,

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/eejsc/Career_Advice_Activities/EEJSC_58-04_Text_WEB.pdf

¹³ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 2018, *Unique individuals, broad skills: Inquiry into school to work transition*, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia,

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/School_to_WorkTransition/Report

to be acquired, and build relevant networks and contacts. Professional development for teachers should help them develop teaching strategies that support contextualised project based study.

The Big Picture Education model demonstrates an effective mix of project and interest based learning, portfolio building, and contributions from across the community, and particularly of business.

Big Picture Education gaining momentum in Australia

The 'Big Picture Education' initiative (a model now popular in many countries), is now in place in forty Australian schools. It is an example of a flexible model that can be incorporated within a year 7-12 curriculum (in Victoria the Croydon Community School adopts the BPE model within its VCAL program).

It combines applied learning with community mentors, employers, and even families playing a vital part in the learning process. Interest and workplace-based internships with community-based mentors for 2 days per week are combined with classroom learning, individual learning plans, portfolio and project based work, and assessment that involves routine presentations of the portfolio to peers, families, mentors and teachers. The model addresses development in Quantitative Reasoning, Empirical Reasoning, Social Reasoning, Communication Skills, and Improving Personal Qualities (<https://www.croydoncs.vic.edu.au/big-picture-education/>)

Recommendations: Overhaul careers exploration and vocational guidance

- 1. Establish a network of vocational exploration and guidance hubs, linked to the National Careers Institute, to assist young people and their families.**
- 2. Start careers exploration early—from Year 7—and embed it in a wide range of subjects.**
- 3. Support young people in and out of school to develop and maintain an education and career plan linked to their aspirations, interests and talents.**
- 4. Increase investment in specialist careers advisors.**
- 5. Equip teachers and trainers to support career conversations and foster project-based learning.**

Lift the status and quality of vocational education

Quality, trust and confidence needs to be rebuilt in Australia's VET sector

Australia's VET sector suffers significant shortcomings which impact on the appeal of vocational education options. Marketisation has resulted in waste, reduced quality and diminished trust across the system. TAFE institutes—a key destination for young people—have been badly damaged. Industry-driven competency-based training has narrowed learning and is not delivering the occupational proficiency or workforce adaptability needed in our contemporary labour market. The system is fragmented, and difficult to navigate.¹⁴

Rebuilding trust and quality in vocational training is pivotal to making it an attractive pathway.

Australia needs a vocation education system, not just a training market

Australia has a public education *system* of schools and universities, but there is no equivalent vocational education system. Instead, we have a publicly subsidised competitive training market. A fundamental re-think of the distinct and complementary roles that could be played by private and public training organizations is needed.

Although much diminished by the competitive training market, TAFE institutes continue to play a vital role across the nation. These key institutions are rooted in place and have significant capital (physical, intellectual and cultural). With a broader remit than other providers, TAFEs have an obligation to serve all fields of education, student of all backgrounds and all areas of Australia.

There is huge potential to harness and reorient this significant community asset as Australia's vocational education system gateway. TAFEs could be geared to underpin excellence in education design and delivery, partner with industry around current and emerging workforce needs, and drive local alignment across the skills eco-system, related support services, other education providers and employers.

Charged with distinctive role and accountabilities to deliver public good outcomes and public value, their mission should include:

- Harnessing local effort by connecting with students, local communities, local industries, unions, employers, local governments, schools and universities to drive social and economic development in their region.
- Deep engagement with local industry and social partners to co-create high quality courses relevant to the local labour market, student aspiration and the development of decent work.

¹⁴ This is a refrain throughout the 'Joyce Review', Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet (DPM&C) 2019, *Strengthening skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System*, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/domestic-policy/vet-review/strengthening-skills-expert-review-australias-vocational-education-and-training-system>. For more see K Bowman, & S McKenna 2016, *The development of Australia's national training system: a dynamic tension between consistency and flexibility*, NCVET, Adelaide, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/the-development-of-australias-national-training-system-a-dynamic-tension-between-consistency-and-flexibility>.

- Connecting and aligning the skills eco-system in their region and supporting multiple modes and channels of delivery (e.g. supporting workplaces that invest in training)
- Re-building and sustaining a workforce of professional vocational teachers and support staff.
- Supporting students, no matter their individual location, needs and aspirations, to gain education and skills for life and work to the best of their ability.
- A networked approach that connects national, state/territory and local, creating the capacity to respond to specific policy imperatives (e.g. climate change, digitisation) and specific industry or occupation demands (e.g. infrastructure and human services)

VET in Schools needs to be overhauled

There are long standing concerns that VETiS, including school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, are not providing meaningful links to work or a well-rounded education. VET training products have been dropped into schools, but are frequently not fit for purpose. Reviews have found that VETiS is not highly valued by employers, with doubts as to the model's capacity to produce young people who are 'job-ready' – in large part because of a lack of exposure to industry and workplaces.¹⁵

VETiS options are often undertaken by the most disadvantaged young people in the school system. It is important that those students who do undertake accredited VET training in schools are not viewed as having a second-rate qualification as this places them at a distinct disadvantage in the labour market. There is significant scope to strengthen the design, delivery, and quality of VETiS including:

Making the links with further training and higher education options more explicit and multi-directional: Flexible models that do not themselves lead to 'dead-ends' and that provide multi-directional pathways—including segues between vocational training and university are needed. Students should be encouraged to experiment with vocational education, knowing that it can be credited to the senior year certificate leading to university, or alternatively, to VET qualifications.

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) are good examples of senior secondary certificates focused on applied learning that enable students to also move into tertiary education.

VCAL and SACE: Two state-based senior secondary certificates building bridges

Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL; y 11-12), which covers literacy and numeracy skills, personal development, industry-specific skills (accredited VET), and work related skills. This certificate runs alongside but is complementary to the 'mainstream' Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Provision is made for 'themed' study for those wishing to focus on specific

¹⁵ The 'Joyce Review': Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet (DPM&C) 2019, *Strengthening skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System*, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/domestic-policy/vet-review/strengthening-skills-expert-review-australias-vocational-education-and-training-system>; see also the speech by Sussan Ley, Assistant Minister of Education (at the TAFE National Achievement Scholarships, 5 March 2014), *The state of VET in Australian schools and the need for greater links with industry and training providers*. <https://ministers.education.gov.au/ley/state-vet-australian-schools-and-need-greater-links-industry-and-training-providers>

employment options and interests, and can be aligned to local labour market conditions. (<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vcal/Pages/ThemedVCAL.aspx>)

South Australian Certificate of Education (y10-12), which not only develops skills in literacy, numeracy, and ICT, but also critical and creative thinking, personal and social capabilities, ethical and intercultural understanding. SACE incorporates an 'explore your capabilities' feature. (<https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/studying/your-sace/capabilities>)

Ensuring that programs and qualifications undertaken by VETiS students have a clear line of sight to an industry or career path:

Currently, there is a disconnect between programs undertaken, and suitable career options and opportunities. To build stronger connections, clearer guidelines to, and roles for, schools, employers, and industry more broadly, should exist for the co-design and development of more relevant programs in schools.

Increasing access to real world workplace learning: VETiS courses often do not provide young people with sufficient 'real world' work experiences or structured workplace learning. There is a need to increase the number and quality of work placements in accredited VETiS qualifications, both to build relationships between young people and employers, and to increase industry confidence and investment in an effective VETiS program.

Extending pre-apprenticeship programs in school settings: The Apprenticeship Employment Network (AEN) and the Global Apprenticeship Network see great merit in the Australian Government funded Multi-Industry Pre-apprenticeship (MIP) which helps year 11-12 students to find a suitable path.¹⁶ This is a model with potential—which could be rolled out across all schools—to ensure that when young people start an apprenticeship, they have a clear idea of what to expect and what the employer expects of them.

Increasing the availability of models that enable young people to engage in employment and training, while remaining engaged in schools: Enabling students to be at school, while also learning and earning supports engagement and retention. Victoria has recently introduced a promising initiative, profiled below, which provides the flexibility for students to study and earn at the same time.

Victoria's Head Start initiative

The Victorian Government's Head Start program, commenced in 2019, is now operating in over one hundred schools. The distinctive feature of this initiative is the flexibility it allows those undertaking years 10, 11 and 12.

Head Start offers the student more time to complete these years of education to accommodate time spent in paid employment through an apprenticeship or traineeship. Under this model,

¹⁶ AEN's response to the Joyce Review states that: 'given the opportunity to trial a range of career pathways, 55% of MIP participants changed their career choice and 82% said they had a greater understanding of employer expectations in the workplace after completing the program. Employers rated the work-readiness of 75% of participants as high to very high'. See <https://aen.org.au/mip/>

year 12 students are able to work three days per week; year 11, two days; and year 10, one day. (<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/headstart.aspx>)

Equipping training providers and schools to support the learning and wellbeing needs of young people experiencing disadvantage. It is critical that schools and training providers are able to deliver school-based VET in a way that supports the improved wellbeing of students experiencing disadvantage and assists them to address barriers to learning and employability. This is explored more fully in the section on lifting outcomes for young people experiencing disadvantage below.

Entrenched and negative views of vocational education limit opportunities

There is an overvaluing of university pathways—by governments, educators, parents and students—at the expense of vocational options. This can steer young people towards inappropriate pathways and increase their risk of disengaging from education—and the focus on ATAR scores can be alienating.

Entwined with this are conceptions about the gendered nature of vocational pathways. Apprenticeships remain largely the preserve of young males, and traineeships the preserve of young females. Likewise, enrolments in certificate’s II and III level are largely characterised by a split between females undertaking traditional ‘feminised’ vocations (the provision of caring, business, hospitality and beauty services); and males undertaking ‘masculinist’ vocations (information technology, trades, sport, fitness and recreation).¹⁷

While recognising poor pay and conditions attached to some areas of certificate qualifications, Australia has a high demand for certificate III and IV holders, which in some areas hold better employment potential and earning capacity than some degrees.¹⁸

Vocational education needs to be promoted as a valued pathway

Fundamentally, there is a need to improve the status of vocational education and training at all levels—policy, funding, institutional and cultural. We welcome the newly established National Careers Institute. It is well positioned to drive this agenda—particularly if its reach is extended via a network of related Vocational Hubs (recommended above). Key activities could include:

- a nation-wide promotional campaign to highlight VET’s intrinsic worth to individuals and their communities, and to raise awareness of its vital role in the educational landscape,
- educating parents as to the benefits and potential of vocational training, and of the steps needed to progress along pathways to vocations that their children will find stimulating and rewarding,

¹⁷ J Misko, M Ackehurst, RA Polvere, T Erzinger & P Korbel, P 2019, *VET for secondary school students: acquiring an array of technical and non-technical skills*, NCVET, Adelaide. https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0041/5579465/VET-for-secondary-school-students.pdf

¹⁸ P Dawkins, P Hurley & P Noonan 2019, *Rethinking and revitalising tertiary education in Australia*, The Mitchell Institute, <http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Rethinking-and-revitalising-tertiary-education-FINAL.pdf>; A Daly 2011, *Vocational qualifications, employment status and incomes: 2006 census analysis*, NCVET, Adelaide.

- awarding prizes for stand-out success for both males and females that defy preconceptions in fields that are highly gendered.

The Victorian Government is rolling out the GET VET campaign (see box below) which could provide some inspiration and early learnings.

Victorian's GET VET Campaign

The Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority's has initiated its GET VET campaign to improve understanding, perceptions and engagement in VET. It targets targeting teachers, parents, students and industry through an array of means and resources. It highlights success stories through a combination of visual displays (online/social media and 'hard'). Its online interface features tabs addressing myths about VET, shows various pathways, and how a range of VCE-VET programs can be multi-directional pathways to accredited training and/or university. (<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/studentguides/getvet/Pages/Index.aspx>)

Recommendations: Lift the quality and status of vocational education

- 6. Foster a strong public vocational education system, which is distinct from and complementary to the competitive training market**
- 7. Overhaul VET in Schools so that it provides an effective pathway into higher-level study or work.**
 - **Make the links with further training and higher education options more explicit and multi-directional.**
 - **Extend pre-apprenticeship programs in school settings.**
 - **Increase the availability of models that enable young people to engage in employment and training, while remaining engaged in schools.**
 - **Equip training providers and schools to support the learning and wellbeing needs of young people experiencing disadvantage.**
- 8. Task the National Careers Institute with promoting vocational education as a valued pathway and resource them to do so.**

Improve outcomes for young people experiencing disadvantage

Experiences of disadvantage and hardship limit pathway options

There is a stark gap in senior secondary pathways outcomes between Australia's more vulnerable students and their peers. The chances of early school leavers building a sustainable livelihood is greatly diminished. They are three times as likely to face deep and persistent disadvantage. Those that have not attained Year 12 or equivalent by age 25 are highly unlikely to ever recover their education.¹⁹

Nationwide data shows the impact of a range of demographic factors, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, location, disability, gender, language background and, most significantly, socioeconomic status (SES) on these outcomes:²⁰

- There is a gap of up to 28 percentage points in the achievement of Year 12 or equivalent qualifications between students from the lowest and highest SES groups—60.6 per cent and 89.1 per cent respectively.
- School non-attendance rates are almost five times higher in fifty of Australia's most disadvantaged areas (22.1% compared to 4.5% in least disadvantaged areas).
- Less than half the Australian population goes on to attend university after school, and only a quarter of young people experiencing disadvantage (from the lowest SES quintile) do.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are 40% less likely to finish high school and 60% less likely to attend university compared to non-aboriginal children.
- Young people attending school in remote locations are only a third as likely to attend university as those living in a major city.
- Trends in VET participation among young people, and in equity groups are going backwards. For example, 2017–2018 enrolment trends show falls of 3.1% for 15–19 year olds, and 3.1% of those in the most disadvantaged areas according to SEIFA.²¹

Equity targets, measures and reporting need to be introduced

Comprehensive data and measures are pivotal to driving accountability, practice and policy reform. Dissolution of the former COAG Reform Council and the National VET Equity Advisory Council have reduced the focus on equity outcomes. The Brotherhood believes that wide-ranging access and equity targets and measures for the school system, as well as the VET and university sectors need to be introduced. Progress against these would be publicly reported annually. Key measures for which COAG ought to set targets that progressively increase over time include:

¹⁹ S Lamb, & S Huo, 2017, *Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education*, Mitchell Institute, Melbourne.

²⁰ S Lamb, J Jackson, A Walstab, *Educational opportunity in Australia 2015*, Mitchell Institute, <https://www.vu.edu.au/news-events/news/educational-opportunity-in-australia-2015-report-who-succeeds-and-who-misses-out>

²¹ NCVET 2019, *Total VET students and courses 2018*, NCVET, Adelaide, https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0031/6925090/Total-VET-students-and-courses-2018.pdf

- an increase in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates for low SES students and key equity groups (noting existing Closing the Gap targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders),
- a target for school attendance, in line with the OECD average, including specific targets for low-SES students' and other key equity groups,
- an expanded range of equity and access indicators in the VET system's performance framework—with associated targets—to include low SES, early school leavers/second-chance learners; and CALD communities (currently measures include Indigenous; People with Disability; and people in rural remote communities).

Student wellbeing is critical to positive pathways

Wellbeing support for students experiencing disadvantage can make the difference between them staying engaged or dropping out. While schools and universities have student support staff, wellbeing support among training providers varies dramatically. There is also a patchwork of small programs in different parts of Australia to assist young people stay connected or reconnect with learning.

It is the Brotherhood's experience that vulnerable young people access various types of support during their education and training, but this is sporadic, disconnected and often driven by crisis.

A youth coach can journey alongside vulnerable students

Consideration ought to be given to resourcing youth coaches to walk alongside vulnerable students—to provide a constant touchpoint during their educational journey.

The Brotherhood uses a coaching approach across its youth programs. It is a key mechanism for operationalising Advantaged Thinking, which is at the heart of our practice with young people. While disadvantaged thinking defines people by their problems and consequently builds services to manage them, Advantaged Thinking focuses on investing in a person's innate skills and talents. It values the potential contribution each person can make and seeks to match their aspirations with opportunities.²²

Relational, solution-focused and goal-oriented in design, coaching supports participants to become independent, self-determine, build motivation and develop a strong sense of future purpose.²³ Coaching is different from case management, which can disempower and problematise people. A relevant example is our use of coaching as part of our Developing Independence initiative.

Youth Coaches assist young people to develop their independence

Created for vulnerable young people, the Brotherhood's Developing Independence is co-delivered by a youth coach and a TAFE trainer. The program supports young people to strengthen their core life management skills and develop a personal vision and plan for their future across a range of domains (e.g. education, employment, housing, relationships, civic

²² S Mallett, S James, N McTiernan & J Buick 2014, *Education First Youth Foyer practice framework*, Hanover Welfare Services and Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

²³ *Transition to Work Community of Practice coaching guide* available on request.

participation and health). The youth coach provides a point of sustained continuity and support, helping the young person advance their aspirations, seek out opportunities, and strengthen relationships with their local community, schools and local specialist youth services. They help to deliver a range of experiential learning activities aimed at building social connection, pathways in education and employment options, and opportunities for building networks.

Schools can help transform communities

Another approach for COAG education ministers to consider is the potential for schools in areas of high disadvantage to operate as community hubs—advancing the circumstances of their students, their families and the local community. Doveton College in Melbourne’s South East is supporting remarkable improvements in wellbeing, and consequently in student outcomes.

Doveton College – delivering results for students, families and local community

Doveton College, situated in Melbourne’s south-east, seeks to respond to a complex range of community issues in an area of entrenched disadvantage. Opened in 2012, it was the first government and philanthropic school partnership of its kind in Australia. Founder Julius Colman (a refugee) has a vision for the College as a vehicle for community transformation and as a place that can engage the whole community.

Key services and supports include: Early Learning Centre; Prep to Year 9 school; a large wellbeing team focusing on local circumstances (e.g. trauma impacting humanitarian entrants); parenting support; daily supported playgroups ; child and family health services; family drop-in facilities; career guidance, work preparation, job search, accredited and non-accredited training programs; community leadership training; adult activity groups; volunteering and social enterprises.

Strong outcomes include high attendance rates (91%),²⁴ significant NAPLAN growth, and reductions in prep children presenting as developmentally vulnerable. The model is being replicated in 10 further locations through a state/philanthropic partnership.

Some young people require high support flexible schooling models

There is a need for high support flexible learning options to promote educational reengagement for highly vulnerable students who are estranged from, or not able to cope in, conventional schools.

These special assistance school should be regarded as legitimate options in the suite of offerings considered by young people, their parents, and those who provide advice to young people when returning to, or remaining in, mainstream schooling is not viable.

²⁴ Doveton College, My School website, <https://www.myschool.edu.au/school/50458>. See also <https://ourplace.org.au/>

National funding and policy levers—such as the funding tagged to the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disabilities, and the Schooling Resource Standard—now make high quality special assistance schools possible. Yet availability of quality high support options remain few are far between.

Such approaches need to be embedded as a legitimate part of Australia’s school system, and accessible across the nation. This must be accompanied by a robust quality framework, clear accountabilities and adequate resourcing.

The Brotherhood’s direct experience of delivering a high support school demonstrates the potential to change the life trajectory of young people who would otherwise be disengaged from school.

The David Scott School enabling young people estranged from convention school to resume their senior secondary pathways

The Brotherhood’s David Scott School in Frankston delivers the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning to over 100 young people who have found mainstream settings unsatisfactory, and/or who have experienced significant hardship. This ‘high needs’ cohort is comprised mostly of those who have been expelled or ‘exited’ from the mainstream. A 75% attendance rate is impressive in this context.²⁵

Building on earlier iterations (reaching back to 2010) the school now delivers specialised, high support, and individualised programs prioritising cutting edge applied learning. Project based learning is combined with accredited vocational training and workplace experience.

Alongside the classroom teaching are teams dedicated to student and family support, and pathways and transition guidance. (<https://www.davidscottschool.vic.edu.au/>)

Education-focused housing support can be game-changing for young people experiencing homelessness

For young people, homelessness or housing insecurity often means their education is severely disrupted or ended. Around two-thirds of young people who experience homelessness are not engaged in education. Consequently, their chances of building a sustainable livelihood are greatly diminished.

The dominant model of homelessness support, while generally effective in responding to the young person’s immediate crisis, is not designed to get them back on track with completing their education, gaining employment and achieving long-term housing stability. There is an urgent need to recast the way youth homelessness is tackled, to include a sharp focus on education, training and employment. This is the thinking behind Education First Youth Foyers, which have been successfully piloted in Victoria.

²⁵ My School website, the David Scott School, <https://www.myschool.edu.au/school/52481/attendance/2018> (2019 data in process)

Education First Youth Foyers are changing lives

Education First Youth Foyers provide student-style accommodation, located on TAFE college campuses, for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Foyer students are supported to access mainstream education, training and employment opportunities. The model invests in building young people's strengths and capabilities so that they have the resilience and the resources to become active, independent adults.

The EFYF model was developed by the Brotherhood in partnership with Launch Housing, and funded by the Victorian Government. Three EFY Foyers are now operating in Victoria: at Holmesglen Institute in Glen Waverley; at Kangan Institute in Broadmeadows; and at Goulburn Ovens Institute in Shepparton. Results of a recent evaluation of demonstrate strong outcomes. Young people moving out of the Foyer:

- have higher rates of Year 12 completion - Year 12 completions increased from 42% at entry to 67% at exit and rising to 75% a year after exit
- have higher educational qualifications - by exit about 30% of participants had completed an education qualification higher than at entry, rising to 46% a year later
- have better housing situations (7% lived in their own place at entry, rising to 43% at exit and 51% a year later and use of crisis accommodation plummeted from 32% at entry to 2% a year after exit) and are more confident in navigating housing systems
- have better mental health, better social connections and more confidence in their ability to manage work, housing and finances.

KPMG have reported the Education First Youth Foyer model represents value for money compared with other foyer-style models.

The model can be replicated at additional TAFE campuses.

The vocational education system needs to be equipped to address needs of learners experiencing disadvantage

Poor VET completion rates among high needs learners are due, in part, to training providers' difficulties in addressing the learning and wellbeing needs of students. There is an urgent need to strengthen learner support. A key recommendation of the recent Braithwaite review of ASQA²⁶ was that the standards of learner support offered by training organisations ought to at least match that required of secondary schools and universities. Key supports need to include:

- intensive language, literacy and numeracy supports,
- access to specialist wellbeing supports—including through strong partnerships between providers and external community support services,

²⁶ Australian Government (Braithwaite report) 2018, *All eyes on quality: review of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 report*, https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/all_eyes_on_quality_-_review_of_the_nvetr_act_2011_report.pdf

- personalised coaching to identify aspirations, co-develop and advance learning and career plans and address barriers to learning,
- supported work experience for students who lack the resources, networks and skills to arrange their own opportunities.

Government-funded websites designed to assist students navigate the VET sector (e.g. MySkills, Training.gov.au) should require of all training providers that they display the leaning/welfare supports they provide, and those they can provide access to via external referrals.

Significant and coherent reform of funding mechanisms is needed to enable this. Consistent approaches to strengthening opportunity and addressing need across the education spectrum would help elevate VET from its current predicament as the poor cousin to schools and universities. Possible approaches include:

A modified Community Service Obligation:²⁷ Support for TAFE and the capacity of community education has been eroded because the funding arrangements for the contestable training market were blind to the distinctive contribution of public providers. As a direct consequence, access to learner supports and quality training for equity groups has suffered.

A national approach to funding delivery of a Community Service Obligation by our public VET institutions (*and* eligible non-TAFE providers) should be urgently considered. Reviews of earlier iterations of the Community Service Obligation funding for Victoria's TAFEs called for refinements, that we endorse, including:²⁸

- specifying the target 'equity groups' covered by the funding
- directing resources to specific needs associated with individualised learning, wellbeing support and pathway planning
- linking CSO funding to measurable outcomes in participation, achievement and transitions
- funding for partnership building between the providers and non-educational supports.

Eligibility of non-TAFE providers for CSO funding would depend on their demonstrated capacity to assist disadvantaged cohorts.²⁹

An important caveat to this recommendation is that it should not be narrowly construed as a means to address the consequences of the stark failure and the competitive training market to deliver for equity groups. To do so would risk residualising TAFEs and their student community.

²⁷ The Community Service Obligation mechanism has been a feature of TAFE funding in several states for many years. Monies are earmarked for TAFEs to fulfil the obligation to provide intensive support to vulnerable and high needs learners.

²⁸ Victorian Government, (authors B McKenzie & N Coulson) 2015, *Final report on VET Funding Review*, https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/VET_Funding_Review.pdf

²⁹ A current model is the New South Wales Government's Smart and Skilled ACE Community Service Obligation Program for training providers (offering accredited and non-accredited training) which funds intensive support for regional student cohorts encountering significant barriers to education.

Instead, CSOs need to be part of a broader plan to establish a high-quality public vocational education system.

Gonski-inspired needs-based funding: A national needs-based funding model for VET along the lines of the Gonski-inspired school funding reforms should also be considered. Layered loadings would reflect community and individual student characteristics.

A live challenge to introducing this approach in the VET sector is ensuring students enrol with providers that have demonstrated commitment and capability to deliver quality supports to high needs learners and communities. The exploitation of vulnerable learners by some for-profit providers points to the need for careful gatekeeping.

Improving pathways outcomes for young people with disability is urgent

School completion rates, further and higher educational attainment rates, workforce participation and employment rates for young people with disability are a national disgrace. Urgent and sustained action is needed across the country—over and above efforts to otherwise address disadvantage.

We acknowledge the importance of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the recent School Leaver Employment Supports—which assist young people to develop work readiness skills. However, Brotherhood research highlights the lack of a coordinated framework for services across Australia for unemployed young people with disability.³⁰ Our research has found the Disability Employment Service is not adequately attuned to the needs of young people, and adopts the similar ‘work first’ approach as do Jobactive providers, with little if any assistance for social skill building.

A recent House of Representatives Inquiry (2018)³¹ recommended the expansion of one service that we also believe should be rolled out nationally. The Ticket to Work initiative—funded initially by the Commonwealth, but now only by philanthropic funds and a contribution from the Victorian Government—features partnerships with many institutions such as TAFEs and universities, and represents a strong bridge between study and work. Thus far, the Commonwealth government has not responded to the Inquiry’s recommendation.

Ticket to Work: linking young people with disability to further education and work

The Ticket to Work initiative is designed to prepare senior secondary school students for employment through the use of career and vocational development, and experience within the workplace. The initiative is delivered through Ticket to Work networks including schools, LLENs, employment services, post school providers and employers. An evaluation revealed that 64% of

³⁰ M Cross 2019 (forthcoming), Who gets what where: review of government funded youth employment programs across Australia, Brotherhood of St Laurence and the University of Melbourne.

³¹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 2018 *Unique individuals, broad skills: Inquiry into school to work transition*, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/School_to_WorkTransition/Report. The evaluation can be found at <http://www.tickettowork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Ticket-to-Work-Post-School-Outcomes-final-2019.docx>.

participants found employment (non-participant control group 33%); 95% completed year 12 (52% for the control group); and 83% were more socially active (65% for the control group). A House of Representatives review called for its expansion. (<http://www.tickettowork.org.au/>)

Recommendations: Improve outcomes for young people experiencing disadvantage

- 9. Establish system-wide measures and targets to lift outcomes across a broad range of equity groups in school, further and higher education settings. Monitor and report on performance against these targets.**
- 10. Strengthen support for vulnerable secondary students by:**
 - **Engaging Youth Coaches to support the educational journey of highly vulnerable young people**
 - **Equipping schools to operate as community hubs in locations of high disadvantage. These would be designed to advance the circumstances of students, their families and the local community**
 - **Extending the availability of high support flexible learning options for young people who are estranged from, or not able to cope in, conventional schools.**
- 11. Recast support for young people experiencing homelessness to include a primary focus on engagement with education or training, inspired by models such as TAFE-based Education First Youth Foyers.**
- 12. Enable TAFE Institutes and community education providers (with a demonstrated track record) to better support the needs of students experiencing disadvantage—through a modified Community Service Obligation or needs based funding.**
- 13. Apply a sharp and urgent focus to lifting pathways outcomes for young people with disability, including through national roll-out of the Ticket to Work initiative**

Adopt a coordinated and consistent approach to the development of ‘soft skills’

Much vocational training and senior years curricula is skewed towards task based competency. There is less attention on ‘soft skills’ which are vital for young people to be engaged, connected, and independent, to make considered judgements and plans about their future, and to advance their development. Young people need the skills to adjust to and navigate the changing economy, and the major upheavals flowing from technological advances, globalisation, climate change, shifting demographics, together with labour market restructuring towards more individualised work. Strengthening soft skills, developing transferable skills and participating in lifelong learning is essential to sustained social and economic participation.

Despite widespread consensus on the importance of ‘soft skills’—for example in Gonski 2.0 and the Melbourne Declaration—an effective means by which these can be consistently developed remains elusive.

A clear and shared understanding of what soft skills are is needed

Currently there are a multitude of interchangeable terms used in discussions about supplementing technical or formal and foundational skills (e.g. ‘soft skills’, ‘core skills for work’, ‘employability skills’, ‘future skills’, ‘generic skills’, ‘capabilities’ etc). This is understandable given the challenge of separating definable, teachable, and assessable technical skills from behavioural traits and dispositions.

While we acknowledge the Australian Government’s Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework, it does not venture enough into soft, non-work related, skills.³²

A common and consistent understanding of ‘soft skills’ needs to be developed and formally adopted for both teaching and assessment purposes, spanning the school, VET and university settings.

Soft skills development needs to be embedded in curricula

A coherent approach to the development of soft skills is vital. Complementary curricula and syllabi—along with related content and teaching material—that focuses on the development of soft skills, using students’ interests, aspirations and input as fundamental touchstones is needed.

Soft skills development offerings—whether in the form of stand-alone courses, or components thereof—should straddle and link secondary, VET, and university settings. They ought to be accorded significant value in progression towards formal qualifications.

Features of various current educational and training frameworks and other conversations can be drawn upon to inform common curricula for soft skills. For example, in the secondary school context:

³² Australian Government, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Core Skills for Work Development Framework, <https://www.employment.gov.au/core-skills-for-work-developmental-framework>

- National middle years F–10 curriculum identifies and fosters a range of ‘general capabilities’. The optional Work Studies learning area includes ‘Work Skills’ and ‘Career and life design’ components.
- the Victorian Curriculum (F–10) provides for development in ‘personal and social capability’, ‘critical and creative thinking’, and ‘civics and citizenship’.
- the South Australian Certificate of Education (years 10–12) develops skills in literacy, numeracy, and ICT, and also critical and creative thinking, personal and social capabilities, ethical and intercultural understanding. It incorporates an ‘explore your capabilities’ feature (see <<https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/studying/your-sace/capabilities>>)
- the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL; years 11–12) includes literacy and numeracy skills, personal development, industry-specific skills (accredited VET), and work related skills. This certificate runs alongside but is complementary to the mainstream Victorian Certificate of Education (<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vcal/Pages/index.aspx>).

There is a climate for change in the VET sector, with more frequent commentary on how the ‘curricula’, through accredited and non-accredited learning, can be transformed to progress soft skills development.³³ We point to:

- various micro credentials and skill-sets within both accredited and non-accredited training, with the latter building on interest and passion-based learning,
- Foundation Skills Training Package, and the Business Services Training Package, both of which provide clusters of competencies and qualifications focusing on personal development and capabilities building.

We also point to the Australian Industry Skills Council’s efforts—via its Cross Sector Projects—to identify common units across the training packages that promote personal development and more socially inclusive VET.³⁴ Two such projects—Teamwork and Communication, and Inclusion of People with Disability—would seem to offer much by way of soft skills development.

We have found in our practice that vulnerable young people benefit from an intensive focus on soft skill development. A vehicle we have designed to deliver this is a **Certificate 1 in Developing Independence** (see panel; also discussed above).

Developing Independence – a focus on strengthening capabilities

Informed by the strengths based ‘Advantage Thinking’ approach, the Brotherhood’s Certificate 1 in Developing Independence includes a focus on building personal competence, creating personal vision, applying informal learning to enhance capabilities, developing literacy and numeracy, dealing with conflict and stress, and developing social competence. It is designed to build aspirations of young people, and help advance these with opportunities.

³³ For a survey of such discussions see https://www.ncver.edu.au/search-results?query=skill+sets&collection=ncver-search&num_ranks=20&meta_z_sand=true&sort=&scope=-fbs

³⁴ <https://www.aisc.net.au/content/cross-sector-projects>

This certificate is delivered by trainers working in collaboration with youth coaches. It is currently provided in a range of settings including Education First Youth Foyers (TAFE-based, supported student accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness); for young people living in out-of-home-care; and for those involved with the justice system. Developing Independence has the potential for much broader application.

Recommendation: A focus on soft skills

- 14. Embed a consistent approach to the development of soft skills across senior secondary, and VET curricula and syllabi. Accord significant value to these in progress towards formal qualifications.**

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