



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

Submission to the Victorian Government

# Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy

(Macklin Review)

Brotherhood of St Laurence

June 2020

## The Brotherhood of St Laurence and skills development

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.

This submission draws on our practical experience, along with our research and that of others. Our skills and training related work includes:

- **partnering with TAFEs** to support young people to access and sustain engagement with education and training. This includes establishment (with Launch Housing) of Education First Youth Foyers. This supportive accommodation, located on TAFE campuses, enables young people experiencing (or at risk of) homelessness to engage in education and training that helps alter their life trajectory.
- **delivering training** to a diverse range of learners – particularly those experiencing disadvantage – through our Group Training Organisation, Learn Local and our former Registered Training Organisation.
- **operating the David Scott School** – a high support independent school for young people who had fallen out of mainstream education. Over 110 senior secondary students are currently undertaking the Victorian Certificate in Applied Learning at the school.
- **innovative employment support models**, sustained by philanthropic, corporate, state and federal funding. This includes delivering the youth-focused Transition to Work (TtW) program, convening a national Community of Practice of (some) TtW providers and facilitating the National Youth Employment Body (NYEB).
- **major Australia-wide research** commissioned by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, and others, as well as numerous evaluations of VET-related support services.

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## Overview

The Brotherhood of St Laurence welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy (Macklin) Review. While acknowledging the Victorian Government's commitment to reviving the state's vocational training system—as well as its swift and wide-ranging response to the COVID-19 crisis<sup>1</sup>—we call for significant reform to overcome key challenges facing learners and their families, providers and industry.

**We make recommendations that together constitute a ten-point plan for reform:**

- 1. Build a vocational education system, with a differentiated training market**
- 2. Broaden TAFEs' role to that of gateway institutions**
- 3. Enhance and expand the Skills and Jobs Centre model**
- 4. Enhance and promote career exploration and vocational training at school and beyond**
- 5. Promote employment and workplace-based training**
- 6. Align the skills and jobs agendas through community-wide, place-based responses**
- 7. Adopt a performance framework focusing on equity outcomes**
- 8. Strengthen student learning and wellbeing support**
- 9. Promote learner mobility and access to new training options**
- 10. Foster a skilled applied learning workforce**

Our submission draws on the Brotherhood's deep understanding of the supports and conditions that Australians need to navigate transitions, particularly the transition from school to work. We have long experience in developing and delivering services to those who, for both structural and individual reasons, struggle to adjust to significant social and economic change. Strategic partnerships with educators, employers, industry bodies, governments and the community are key to our approach. We also have a long history of evaluation and research into issues of work, vocational education, school engagement and attainment, and employer partnerships.<sup>2</sup>

Our analyses and recommendations span the Terms of Reference, focusing mainly on the experiences of disadvantaged learners and solutions to enhance their outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> See the state's \$1.7 billion Economic Survival Package and the Working for Victoria initiative (\$500m). <https://www.vic.gov.au/workingforvictoria>. A \$260.8m crisis response package includes a \$191.9m guarantee to lock in VET funding at expected pre-COVID-19 levels and an additional \$68.9 million in crisis support to ensure the public training system can respond and recover.

<sup>2</sup> Dommers, E, Myconos, G, Swain, L, Yung, S & Clarke, K 2017, *Engaging young early school leavers in vocational training*, NCVER, Adelaide; Myconos, G 2016, *Supporting transitions to employment for young job seekers: a resource for program development in south-east Melbourne by Chisholm and Holmesglen TAFEs*, Brotherhood of St Laurence.

## Key challenges

We identify a number of barriers to improving skills development in Victoria:

- diminished capacity and reputation of the VET system
- vocational guidance failing to meet the challenge
- low investment in applied learning in schools and in workplaces
- weak links between training and work
- collaboration in place missing or not consistently applied
- low investment in challenged learners
- limited investment in workforce development.

### Diminished capacity and reputation of the VET system

The negative effects of the demand-driven model for VET are still being felt. That approach attracted numerous substandard private providers that failed to deliver quality training for learners and employers. The subsequent reverse in policy led to severe funding cuts across the sector, diminishing the capacity of TAFEs, reducing the number of private providers and harming the quality and reputation of the sector. As a consequence, it has proved difficult to attract and retain learners and a high-quality and highly skilled workforce.

### Vocational guidance failing to meet the challenge

The vocational training sector is mysterious to many prospective learners and, indeed, the community as a whole: the costs associated with training, the range of course and qualification options and subsidy and entitlement regimes often appear complicated and confusing. As they contemplate vocational training, young people in particular often lack the information, skills and resources to make informed decisions; they need targeted support and guidance. Looking beyond vocational training; many young people lack an awareness of employer expectations.<sup>3</sup>

### Low investment in applied learning in schools and in workplaces

Approaches to applied learning are in need of investment, innovation and support, especially in relation to disadvantaged learners. Applied learning options in schools (e.g. VCAL and others where equipment, materials and training services must be purchased) are more costly and time-consuming to deliver than instructional learning options. A large proportion of disadvantaged students opt for VET while at school; however, schools often struggle to provide the tailored support required for students to succeed.

Equally, problems exist in employment and workplace-based training. Participation in apprenticeships and traineeships was in steep decline even prior to the COVID-19 crisis, with commencements dropping 26% since 2014 and completions by 47%.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Dommers, E, Myconos, G, Swain, L, Yung, S & Clarke K 2017, *Engaging young early school leavers in vocational training*, NCVET, Adelaide; Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet 2019, *Strengthening skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System* (the Joyce review), <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/domestic-policy/vet-review/strengthening-skills-expert-review-australias-vocational-education-and-training-system>, p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> NCVET 2018, *Apprentices and trainees 2018: June quarter – Australia*, NCVET, Adelaide.

Employer and broader community involvement is uneven at best, with efforts to assist learners navigate the system fragmented across regions, sectors and jurisdictions.

### Weak links between training and work

Many note the mismatch between the skills acquired through vocational education, and the skills needed in the contemporary labour market. The employment outcomes of training underline this claim. Only about 30% of those that undertake training go on to work in the occupation for which they have trained. Among the many factors influencing such skewed learning outcomes is the rigidity of competency-based-training and training packages. This regime does not adapt quickly to changing labour markets.<sup>5</sup>

### Collaboration in place is missing or patchy

There is a lack of coordination across community supports, services and employers, as well as a paucity of educational options that can offer ancillary supports. A myriad of services—schools, vocational training organisations, jobactive providers, local government services, Centrelink and others—comply with differing expectations and imperatives, and this frequently hinders a young person's line of sight to suitable employment or training options.

### Low investment in challenged learners

Since the dissolution of the National VET Equity Advisory Council in 2014, Australian governments have demonstrated limited commitment to improving outcomes for 'equity groups'. Trends in VET participation by disadvantaged learners in Victoria are concerning (see Appendix). For example, participation rates for the lowest two SEIFA quintiles have declined sharply: in the 2015–2018 period by 11.3% (quintile 1) and by 15.5% (quintile 2).<sup>6</sup> Between 2016 and 2018 there were falls of 26.1% for VET enrolments of those aged 15–19 years, and 23.7% for those aged 20–24 years. Proportional declines were higher among early school leavers than among Year 12 completers. Only an estimated 40–60% of those enrolled go on to attain their qualification.<sup>7</sup> Cuts to VET providers have severely limited their capacity to assist students, leading to the uneven quality of the training itself, the lack of learning and wellbeing support, and the lack of the vocational guidance that learners need.

### Limited investment in workforce development

The vocational training workforce—within VET and schools—lacks resources and support. Applied learning carries little status within mainstream schools and teacher training institutions. Most teaching graduates have little understanding of applied learning, or of formal vocational training. Few have been equipped by their formal training with the skills needed to teach relevant, hands-on and applied content.<sup>8</sup> The VET teacher workforce remains under-resourced, precarious and without adequate career progression and professional development options. Such challenges are of great concern given that these professionals cater for many second-chance learners.

<sup>5</sup> Wheelahan, L, Buchanan, J & Yu, S 2015, *Linking qualifications and the labour market through capabilities and vocational streams*, NCVER, Adelaide.

<sup>6</sup> NCVER 2019, *Total VET students and courses 2018*, NCVER, Adelaide.

<sup>7</sup> NCVER 2018, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: VET program completion rates 2016*, NCVER, Adelaide, [https://www.voced.edu.au/vital\\_node\\_create/ngv\\_80349](https://www.voced.edu.au/vital_node_create/ngv_80349)

<sup>8</sup> Brown, M & O'Reilly-Briggs, K 2017, *The teacher education of VET in Schools (VETiS) teachers*, La Trobe University, Bundoora.

## Meeting the challenges

### **Build a vocational education system, with a differentiated training market**

There is a need to improve the status of vocational education and training in all jurisdictions at all levels—policy, funding, institutional and cultural. The VET sector must be regarded not solely as a field of competition, but as a vital community asset accorded the same status as primary and secondary school systems and universities. To fully realise the potential of vocational training, and to counter persistent negative perceptions, the Victorian Government must firstly implement a suite of reforms—to improve the capacity of TAFEs (see below), vocational training and career guidance for the young, the involvement of employers, learner supports, modes of delivery and/or training products, and workforce development—and then supplement these with a campaign of reputation building. A promising first step, which should be expanded, is the Victorian Government's GET VET campaign.<sup>9</sup> Efforts to build a stronger vocational education system should proceed through collaboration with agencies and stakeholders across Victoria, and nationally through the National Skills Commission and National Careers Institute.

### **Broaden TAFEs' role to that of gateway institutions and enhance and expand the Skills and Jobs Centre model**

We must invest in TAFEs as gateway institutions in order to build much deeper connections with and across community and industry. Gateway TAFEs will link to diverse communities through micro-campuses and thus better respond to local needs. This requires building TAFEs' capacity to innovate and provide specialist supports for all cohorts, and particularly for the young: the TAFE-based Education Youth Foyers (for those at risk of homelessness) serve as examples of innovation in training and support.

Expansion and enhancement of TAFE-based Skills and Jobs Centres (SJC) model is part of such enhanced institutional capacity building. The SJCs have the potential to extend a training and support offer to diverse communities and cohorts. This means adding the specialisation needed to assist challenged learners, and the brief to deepen connections with community, industry, support services and other education sectors.

### **Enhance career exploration and promote vocational training for those at school and beyond**

Young people should be provided from early to mid-secondary years with quality information about pathways options and the benefits of vocational training. This should be achieved through a combination of enhanced face-to-face and digital careers advice in schools and the community, existing Career Action Plan activities, workplace experience, better resourced applied learning options in schools, and mentoring. A Year 10 intervention that combines all these elements—and involves families and peers—is needed. Post-secondary schooling guidance is vital, particularly for those upskilling, retraining or returning to work after prolonged absence. Assistance should help mature prospective learners to navigate training and entitlement options, access specialised

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<sup>9</sup> The Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority's GET VET campaign aims to improve understanding, perceptions and engagement in VET. It targets teachers, parents, students and industry.  
<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/studentguides/getvet/Pages/Index.aspx>

literacy and numeracy supports, and utilise diverse pathways (e.g. interest-based learning through Adult Community Education organisations).

### **Promote employment and workplace-based training**

Innovation in apprenticeships and traineeships is needed for the current turbulent economic context and the emerging labour market. Improved pre-apprenticeship models are needed, as is the introduction of traineeships in sectors that have not traditionally catered for them (e.g. health care). The expansion of the Head Start model is an important step in promoting workplace-based training alongside secondary schooling.

### **Align the skills and jobs agendas through community-wide, place-based responses**

Cross-sectoral collaborative efforts, grounded in local training and labour markets, are needed to build tailored, responsive pathways to growth occupations and industries. Innovative place-based responses such as the Brotherhood's Community Investment Committees should be replicated to foster employer, school, TAFE and community involvement. Governments should invest in such approaches to youth employment that harness local effort to drive social and economic development in their region by connecting communities, employers, local governments, schools and universities, not only to enable pathways to work, but to actively engage in the co-creation of new job opportunities for young people.

### **Adopt a performance framework focusing on equity outcomes**

Victoria must introduce a performance framework to monitor outcomes for equity groups, along with targets designed to improve participation, achievement and transition outcomes. This should result in an annual statement of progress of equity groups, along with findings that help policy-makers address barriers to participation and completion. The Victorian Government should work with the Commonwealth to have a similar framework adopted nationally.

### **Strengthen student learning and wellbeing support**

Stronger coordination and alignment between those operating in the training system and those in public and community support services is needed. Training providers must be compelled to either provide or access specialised supports for challenged students. The expectations of training providers of all kinds should be raised in relation to the standard of student support provided. Innovations such as the Ticket to Work program linking learners with disability to further employment and education opportunities should be expanded; and funding provided for tailored preparatory courses for Foundation level VCAL. Training-aligned support innovations (e.g. the Brotherhood's Education First Youth Foyers for those at risk of homelessness) should also be expanded. An enhanced Community Service Obligation funding model should be introduced to help TAFEs better cater for high-needs students.

### **Promote learner mobility and access to new training options**

Mobility should be promoted through innovations in training products such as skill sets and micro-credentials, providing they are industry-endorsed and maintain a line of sight to employment.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> As recommended in the latest review of the AQF. See <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-qualifications-framework-review-0>

Learners should be enabled to move more easily across VET and university settings through a common credit point system which gives recognition in university entry systems to VET qualifications and some short-form credentials.

### **Foster a skilled applied learning workforce**

Incentives should be provided to teacher training institutions to run degree-level programs that enable teachers to switch between 'instructional' and 'applied' learning. The Victorian Government should lead collaborations between universities, TAFEs and the VET Development Centre to develop new VET teaching qualifications and skills development frameworks.

### **Take advantage of the national mood for change**

We urge the Victorian Government to advocate for adoption of many of our recommendations nationally. For example, Community Service Obligation funding, the expansion of the Skills and Jobs Centre model, workforce development, training product reform and improving equity group outcomes through closer scrutiny and targets—can be expedited through cross-jurisdiction collaboration. Only through such collaboration will it be possible to improve the standing of VET for all learners, and particularly for the disadvantaged.



## Recommendations

### Build a vocational education system, with a differentiated training market

1. Ensure that VET is repositioned in the state educational landscape as a high status, high-quality and valued educational option. Progress towards this ideal will rely on extending the GET VET campaign, and collaboration and Commonwealth agencies overseeing similar reform across Australia.

### Broaden TAFEs' role to that of gateway institutions

2. Increase public investment in and commitment to the vocational training system by expanding the role of TAFEs as gateway institutions, enabling them to play a pivotal role in shaping local economic development, local collaboration, and innovative delivery, products and workforce development.

### Enhance and expand the Skills and Jobs Centre model

3. Skills and Jobs Centres should be enhanced to provide more comprehensive learner supports; promote skills and capabilities building, real world opportunities, and vocational guidance; and build stronger links across the community, education and industry.

### Enhance career exploration and promote vocational training for those at school and beyond

4. Implement programs from mid-secondary school that increase awareness of vocational training options and benefits among young people and their families.
5. Begin career exploration earlier—building on current Career Action Plans and mentoring programs—and feature a pathways-oriented Year 10 intervention.
6. Boost funds for the upskilling and availability of careers advisors and educators in schools and TAFEs, and for activities such as incursions from those working in various industries, and other interactions with training providers and employers.

### Promote employment and workplace-based training

7. Lift expectations of schools and training organisations to arrange workplace experience.
8. Expand the Head Start model.
9. Promote pre-apprenticeship models that include in their design broader career exploration.
10. Promote traineeships and innovation in employment-based training.

### Align the skills and jobs agendas through community-wide, place-based responses

11. Encourage greater employer, school, TAFE and community representation on place-based Community Investment Committees, and greater involvement in similar enabling initiatives such as the Transition to Work Community of Practice.
12. Resource Community Investment Committees to produce aids, guidelines and materials that will lead to more course co-design and workplace-based training.

### Adopt a performance framework focusing on equity outcomes

13. Adopt a VET system performance framework to monitor outcomes for equity groups, along with targets designed to respond to improve participation, achievements and transition outcomes.
14. Publish an annual statement of progress of equity groups—to be released concurrently with the state's training market report—along with findings to help policy-makers address barriers to participation and completion.
15. Work with the Commonwealth to have a similar framework adopted nationally.

### Strengthen student learning and wellbeing support

16. Implement Braithwaite Review recommendations calling for registered training organisations (RTOs) to provide the same level of student support as do schools and universities, and compel providers to provide stronger access to expert support services beyond the VET system
17. Adopt an enhanced Victorian Community Service Obligation funding model to help TAFEs and eligible RTOs to better cater for high-needs students.
18. Expand the Ticket to Work program linking learners with disability to employment and education opportunities.
19. Fund Education First Youth Foyers, and similar innovations in training-aligned support.
20. Introduce and fund a vocational preparation course for Foundation level VCAL students.

### Promote learner mobility and access to new training options

21. Promote more flexible training products—including skill sets and micro-credentials—which are industry-endorsed and maintain a line of sight to employment.
22. Establish a common definition of 'soft skills' and then a consistent approach to such skills development and assessment across school and VET curricula.
23. Implement an AQF Review recommendation to introduce a common credit point system—recognising VET qualifications and short-form credentials—for easier movement between VET and universities.

### Foster a skilled applied learning workforce

24. Provide incentives to teacher training institutions to offer degree-level programs that equip teachers to switch between 'instructional' and 'applied' learning.
25. Promote collaboration between universities, TAFEs and the Victorian VET Development Centre to develop a revised VET teaching qualification and skills development framework.

## Recommendations explained

### 1. Build a vocational education system, with a differentiated training market

#### Promote vocational education as a valued pathway

While Australia has a public education system of schools and universities, there is no equivalent vocational education system. Instead, we maintain a publicly subsidised competitive training market. The demand-driven approach to funding in Victoria (most evident between 2009 and 2015) attracted numerous substandard private providers, many of which focused on profiteering and disreputable practices. The reputation of Victoria's training system, providers and products suffered as a result. Fundamentally, there is a need to improve the status of vocational education and training in all jurisdictions at all levels—policy, funding, institutional and cultural.<sup>11</sup>

The preoccupation with university—by governments, educators, parents and students—at the expense of vocational options often steers young people towards inappropriate pathways and increases their risk of disengaging from training.

Entwined with this are gendered conceptions about vocational pathways. Apprenticeships remain largely the preserve of young males, and traineeships the preserve of young females. Likewise, enrolments at Certificate II and III level are largely 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).<sup>12</sup>

To fully realise the potential of vocational training, and to counter persistent negative perceptions, the Victorian Government must firstly implement a suite of reforms—to improve the capacity of TAFEs (see below), vocational training and career guidance for the young, the involvement of employers, learner supports, modes of delivery and/or training products, and workforce development—and then supplement these with a campaign of reputation building.

To improve the perceptions of vocational education we believe the Victorian Government should facilitate promotional collaborations across the nation, and a wider range of agencies (e.g. Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, the state's Local Learning and Employment Networks, the Career Industry Council of Australia, as well as industry and education peak bodies).

The Victorian Government's GET VET campaign should provide inspiration, and a potential model for replication across Australia.<sup>13</sup> To this end we urge the Victorian Government to collaborate

<sup>11</sup> Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet 2019, Strengthening skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System (the Joyce review), <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/domestic-policy/vet-review/strengthening-skills-expert-review-australias-vocational-education-and-training-system>, p83

<sup>12</sup> Misko, J, Ackehurst, M, Polvere, RA, Erzinger, T & Korbel, P 2019, *VET for secondary school students: acquiring an array of technical and non-technical skills*, NCVER, Adelaide.

[https://www.ncver.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0041/5579465/VET-for-secondary-school-students.pdf](https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0041/5579465/VET-for-secondary-school-students.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority's GET VET campaign aims to improve understanding, perceptions and engagement in VET. It targets teachers, parents, students and industry. It highlights success

with the newly established National Skills Commission and National Careers Institute to build on GET VET's learnings, and to:

- mount a nationwide publicity campaign to highlight VET's intrinsic worth to individuals and their communities, and its vital role in the educational landscape
- educate parents as to the benefits of vocational training, and the steps needed to progress along pathways to vocations that their children will find stimulating and rewarding.

**Recommendation: Build a vocational education system, with a differentiated training market**

1. Ensure that VET is repositioned in the state educational landscape as a high status, high-quality and valued educational option. Progress towards this ideal will rely on extending the GET VET campaign, and collaboration and Commonwealth agencies overseeing similar reform across Australia.

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stories through a combination of visual displays (online/social media and 'hard'). Its online interface addresses myths about VET, shows various pathways, and shows how 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>

## 2. Broaden TAFEs' role to that of gateway institutions

Although much diminished by the competitive training market, TAFE institutes continue to play a vital role. They are rooted in place, have significant capital (physical, intellectual and cultural) and have a broader remit than other training providers, with an obligation to provide a wider range of training, and to serve students of all backgrounds.

We applaud the recent Victorian Government initiatives that have affirmed TAFEs as the state's gateway institutions in VET.<sup>14</sup> Yet more can be done. There is great potential to develop this significant community asset as a network of gateway institutions. Their mission should include:

- harnessing local effort—through main and micro-campus—by connecting with students, local communities, unions, employers, local governments, schools and universities to drive social and economic development in their region
- strong engagement with local industry and social partners to co-create high-quality courses relevant to the local labour market, and student aspirations
- aligning the training and employment ecosystems in their region and supporting multiple modes of delivery (e.g. online and distance learning, workplace-based training)
- rebuilding and sustaining a workforce of professional vocational teachers and support staff that can provide highly accessible vocational guidance
- supporting all 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 connecting the national, state and local, and creating the capacity to respond to policy imperatives (e.g. COVID-19, climate change, digitisation).

A substantial investment in TAFE capacity is needed to ensure that they become gateway institutions. Additional funding must be made available for resources, including:

- skilled personnel
- lease or purchase of office space and teaching facilities in regional locations, and additional building requirements on the main campuses
- upgrades of IT and online teaching capacity
- leasing or purchase of the equipment needed for training.

### Establish demonstration sites as TAFE gateway institutions

The Victorian Government should build on the expertise and specialities of TAFEs to enable them to play more prominent roles in local and state educational and economic development. To commence a network of such gateway institutions, we propose developing the Kangan Institute of TAFE and GOTAFE (Shepparton) as demonstration sites.

The Brotherhood and Kangan Institute have collaborated since 2013, providing a youth education and training offer for young people in Hume. Kangan Institute is well placed to act as a gateway institution given its innovative approaches to providing guided access to education and training

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<sup>14</sup> These initiatives (2015–2020) include the TAFE Rescue Fund, TAFE Back to Work, TAFE Community Service Fund, and TAFE provision of over 40 courses at government expense.

pathways with a line of sight to employment, particularly for young people experiencing disadvantage. GOTAFE is also highly innovative and well suited to act as a demonstration site. It is deeply embedded in the Goulburn community and is trialling several innovative education and support programs that bring together different sectors and service systems to ensure all young people can access and sustain engagement in meaningful education and training.

Both institutes have helped establish Education First Youth Foyers for young people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, and have co-delivered to Foyer students the goal-setting Certificate I in Developing Independence. They are active participants on local governance groups, including local Community Investment Committees, which provide a central collaborative mechanism for bringing together industry, employment, VET and youth service systems, and for enabling the involvement of Adult Community Education (ACE) providers and of services such as Next Step, Reconnect and Transition to Work.

**Recommendations: Broaden TAFEs' role to that of gateway institutions**

2. Increase public investment in and commitment to the vocational training system by expanding the role of TAFEs as gateway institutions, enabling them to play a pivotal role in shaping local economic development, local collaboration, and innovative delivery, training products and workforce development.

### 3. Enhance and expand the Skills and Jobs Centre model

We see great merit in the Victorian Government's Skills and Jobs Centre (SJC) model. With the first established in 2015, SJs are now in over 28 locations across 17 TAFEs (Wodonga TAFE also provides SJC services through 'outreach centres' such as neighbourhood centres). The SJs provide careers, apprenticeship and traineeship advice; help with job searching, preparing resumes and career plans, using online resources and using existing skills to start retraining; referral to welfare support and financial advice; and information on employment trends, skills shortages and training qualification options.<sup>15</sup>

#### Add greater capacity and specialisation

While SJs are currently assisting prospective learners make informed decisions about their pathway choices, we see the need for enhancements that equip SJs to provide specialised support for those with specific needs. Such support, in situ or by referral, is needed to assist those experiencing hardship, disadvantage and complex barriers to training. The enhanced SJs should be resourced to provide more face-to-face service, online and phone support, and be promoted as a public service for the community as a whole. Enhanced SJC services would also be available to schools and training providers to supplement their in-house careers guidance.

While these enhanced SJs should support people of all ages—linking education, employment and other community supports—we see the need to cater for the special needs of youth. SJs should build collaboration with key actors in the training and employment ecosystem, such as the Adult Community Education providers (Learn Locals etc.), Local Learning and Employment Networks, and Community Investment Committees (see p.23), and affirm TAFEs as gateway institutions. The suite of services we believe the SJs should provide appear in the table below.

<b>Key elements of enhanced Skills and Job Centres</b>	
<b>Linked to schools and trade training centres</b>	Working with schools and trade training centres to facilitate work experience and volunteer work, and promote better workplace learning opportunities
<b>Outreach for early school leavers</b>	Identification and tailored engagement of early school leavers
<b>Coherent, connected ACE and VET offerings</b>	Co-location and/or co-delivery of programs that provide students, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, with access to ACE providers
<b>Connections to support services</b>	Connections to TAFE student support and external services such as mental health, youth justice, settlement, housing, employment
<b>Vocational guidance and pathway navigation</b>	Help enhance pathways through school, pre-accredited training, accredited qualifications and higher education. Provide skilled and ongoing pathway planning and career development, and support for navigating the VET and university system, particularly at the point of enrolment and initial engagement.
<b>Learning assessment and support</b>	Provide language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) and other relevant assessments to identify students with significant learning needs to inform pathway planning. Connect young people to courses and educational settings relevant to their learning needs, and foster ongoing engagement and participation.

<sup>15</sup> See

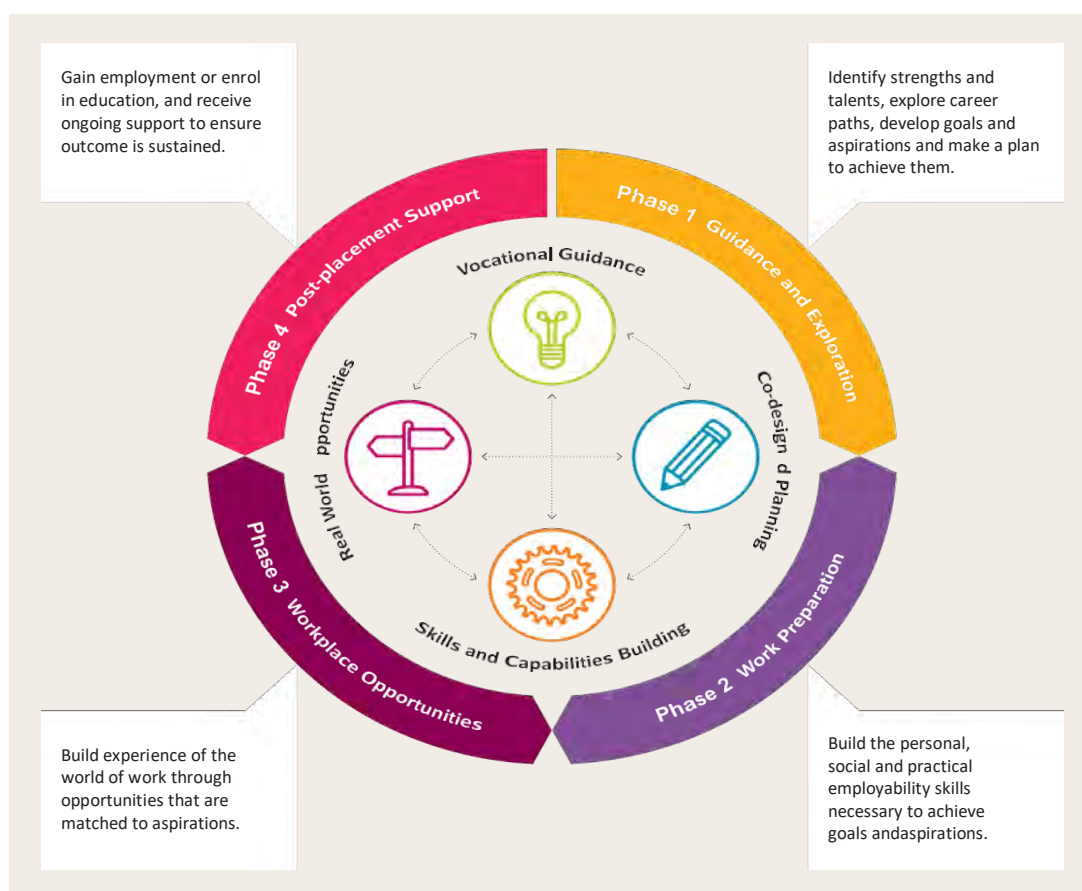
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/pathways/skillsandjobscentres/Pages/default.aspx>

Key elements of enhanced Skills and Job Centres	
<b>Employer and industry connections</b>	Help access real world employment opportunities including work exposure and experience, and work placements to support training.
<b>Evidence-informed service provision linked to national policy</b>	Participate in a network-wide Community of Practice to foster shared practice, learning, innovations and develop a shared evidence base. Link to and collaborate with the National Careers Institute.

In addition to enhancing the SJC model throughout Victoria, the Brotherhood urges the Victorian Government to advocate for such a model across Australia, through its engagement with the National Skills Commission and the Australian Industry Skills Committee.

### Embed core principles to inform practice in enhanced Skills and Jobs Centres

The Brotherhood has put into practice across its programs elements that should be embedded in SJC operations. These are indicated in the diagram below.<sup>16</sup>



The Brotherhood adopts the concept of Advantaged Thinking in its work with young people.<sup>17</sup> This recognises all young people have strengths, talents and potential and can make a vital contribution to society when given access to the necessary opportunities, resources and networks. Advantaged Thinking moves towards identifying, developing and, importantly, investing in young people's skills and capabilities.

<sup>16</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.

<sup>17</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.



**Recommendations: Enhance and expand the Skills and Jobs Centre model**

3. Skills and Jobs Centres should be enhanced to provide more comprehensive learner supports; promote skills and capabilities building, real world opportunities and vocational guidance; and build stronger links across the community, education and industry.

## 4. Enhance career exploration and promote vocational training for those at school and beyond

### Better prepare mid-secondary students

Younger secondary school students often have little awareness of future options and lack insight into their natural aptitudes. Many have inadequate knowledge of employer expectations, and are not ready for what is expected of them in the workplace. This is particularly the case for those experiencing disadvantage as they are more likely to lack the necessary social capital—resources, networks and support—to navigate Australia's changing labour market.

Specific challenges for mid-secondary students include:

- limited access to careers information until late in their schooling
- little exposure to information about vocational and further education options
- parents with limited capacity to provide career guidance for a changed labour market
- few opportunities to experiment with different vocational options before committing to a course or other career pathway.<sup>18</sup>

From as early as possible young people should be actively involved in developing and enacting personal visions and goals. Careers exploration should be embedded progressively in the secondary school curriculum, and be tailored to the young person's developmental stage, needs and circumstances.

### Introduce a Year 10 intervention

We see the need for an intensive intervention at Year 10, a critical moment when important decisions can be considered. A Year 10 intervention would introduce young people to the range of post-school career and further learning options. This particularly important for girls, who face an extra barrier of gendered career pathways.<sup>19</sup>

We see great merit in building on the Victorian school Career Action Plans (CAPs), which commence in Year 7. Through these plans young people consider a wide range of industries and careers that match their interests, skills and abilities. The importance of such exploration before narrowing options and committing to accredited vocational training cannot be overstated. We believe CAP activity can be enhanced.

A series of activities should be staged during Year 10—in conjunction with CAP activities—that sharpen young people's focus on future career possibilities. The school calendar for Year 10 students should include:

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<sup>18</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.

<sup>19</sup> For more on gendered career pathways in VET see Simon, L & Clarke, K 2016, 'Apprenticeships should work for women too!', *Education + Training*, vol. 58, no. 6, pp. 578–96, <http://wave.org.au/wave/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Apprenticeships-should-work-for-women-too-published.pdf>; and Butler, E, Clarke, K & Simon, L 2014, *Hard hats, robots and lab coats: broadening the career options of young women*, eS4W/WAVE, [http://wave.org.au/wave/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/WAVE\\_eS4W\\_HardHats\\_CareerReportFinal-1.pdf](http://wave.org.au/wave/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/WAVE_eS4W_HardHats_CareerReportFinal-1.pdf)

- walkthroughs or virtual tours of TAFE campuses and small-medium training providers, sample lessons, and access to podcasts and videos on vocational training
- guest speaking events from young people who have successfully transitioned to post-secondary studies or employment
- tours of workplaces, as well as community organisations, sporting clubs, trade unions; and introductions to potential mentors, through digital modes or face to face
- presentations by Year 10 students to peers and staff on CAPs and evolving preferences
- awareness-raising events that showcase a given industry or employer expectations.

### Boost resourcing for careers advice

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 schools must be given 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:

- adjusting 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 duties<sup>20</sup>
- increasing funds to cover professional development, that is for increased time allocation, advisor materials, travel for industry engagement and the latest digital interventions.<sup>21</sup>

Teachers in school and training organisations should contribute to career exploration. Secondary school and VET teachers need to be familiarised with processes and resources that can assist young people to consider and plan for the post-secondary school experience. Project and interest-based learning that prompts exploration of future pathways should be encouraged from an early age. Projects involve sustained work over time and connections outside the classroom. As career inclinations emerge, the teacher can assist students to explore the skills to be acquired, and build relevant networks. Teacher training programs should broaden the scope for inclusion of vocational-oriented instruction.<sup>22</sup>

### Feature mentoring more prominently

The current Department of Education mentoring program<sup>23</sup> should be expanded for Years 10, 11 and 12 students, and broadened to involve community partners from sporting clubs, services and

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<sup>20</sup> 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>

<sup>21</sup> 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](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/eejsc/Career_Advice_Activities/EEJSC_58-04_Text_WEB.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> 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](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/School_to_WorkTransition/Report)

<sup>23</sup> See <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/behaviour/engagement/Pages/student-mentoring.aspx>

employers, as well as young adults who have transitioned to further education, training or employment. Mentoring relationships established at this point would have the aim of introducing young people to new ideas and networks of support. Ideally, these mentoring relationships would continue when the student entered Year 11 via VCAL or VCE.

### Value applied learning options in schools through increased funding and support

Students that undertake accredited VET in schools—and particularly disadvantaged young Victorians—must not be viewed as having a second-rate qualification, as this places them at a distinct disadvantage in the labour market. The status of the VCAL and vocational training in general should thus be enhanced and promoted.

Applied learning options, including the VCAL, are more costly to deliver than instructional learning options. Pathways staff must be on hand, and work closely with teachers to deliver a course that reaches far beyond the school/provider premises. Staff must also devote considerable time to liaising with training providers and accompanying students to RTO settings to ease the disorientation many feel when switching from one setting to another.

Additional costs are incurred where VCAL providers maintain training facilities on campus (e.g. commercial kitchens, barista stations); and when they subsidise the purchase of essential materials (e.g. boots for training in construction or horticulture). Costly wellbeing support is also an imperative in many VCAL provider settings, given that a significant proportion of VCAL students have experienced disadvantage.<sup>24</sup> These students are more likely to need support from family therapists, mental health specialists or housing workers.

The Victorian Government's Targeted VET funding regime enables VCAL providers and their students to access around 45 Certificate II/III courses. However, the funding often falls short of meeting training costs, particularly when students—through a process of exploration—switch VET programs. Many of these programs require relatively expensive materials (e.g. protective clothing) that can go to waste.

#### **Recommendations: Enhance career exploration and promote vocational training for those at school and beyond**

4. Implement programs from mid-secondary schooling that increase the awareness of vocational training options and benefits among young people and their families.
5. Begin career exploration earlier—building on current Career Action Plans and mentoring programs—and feature a pathways-oriented Year 10 intervention.
6. Boost funds for the upskilling and availability of careers advisors and educators in schools and TAFEs, and for activities such as incursions from those working in various industries, and other interactions with training providers and employers.

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<sup>24</sup> The Victorian Auditor-General's Office analysis of 2011 data showed that 37% of VCAL students were from the lowest SES quartile, and 31% from the lower-middle quartile.

## 5. Promote employment and workplace-based training

### Schools and training providers must place a higher priority on workplace-based learning

VET Delivered to Secondary Students (VDSS) provides strong links to work and a well-rounded education and should be promoted. VDSS participants enjoy better outcomes—in terms of gaining full-time and permanent ongoing jobs; and in the likelihood of completing an apprenticeship—than peers who did not undertake VDSS (5 years after completion).<sup>25</sup> Increasing the number and quality of work placements in accredited VDSS qualifications would build relationships between young people and employers, and increase industry confidence and investment. The Victorian Structured Workplace Learning curriculum provides a solid base for providing young people with more 'real world' work experiences.<sup>26</sup> There is scope for both increasing the hours of workplace-based training required for existing qualifications, and introducing workplace-based training in other qualifications and accredited courses where it is currently not required.

### Expand the Head Start model across and beyond government schools

We see great merit in the Head Start model as it enables young people undertaking Years 10, 11 and 12 to keep multiple options 'alive' while trialling an apprenticeship or traineeship. The distinctive feature of this initiative is its flexibility. Head Start offers the student more time to complete these years of education, to accommodate the time spent in paid employment through an apprenticeship or traineeship. Under this model, Year 12 students are able to work three days per week; Year 11, two days; and Year 10, one day.<sup>27</sup> Head Start should be rolled out to all government schools and promoted to non-government schools.

### Promote pre-apprenticeship models

Pre-apprenticeship and vocational preparation programs should be extended throughout Victoria. Stand-out models are those that promote career exploration during employment, and include:

- Civil Construction Federation's Civil Skills Cadetship Program, featuring a career decision-making process, cross-industry units of competency, foundation skills, Civil Industry Mentoring and supported entry into linked jobs
- the Australian Government funded Multi-Industry Pre-apprenticeship (MIP) which helps Year 11–12 students to find a suitable path.<sup>28</sup> This model could potentially be rolled out across all Victorian 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.

<sup>25</sup> Misko, J, Chew, E & Korbel, P 2020, VET for secondary school students: post-school employment and further training destinations, NCVET, Adelaide; 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>.

<sup>26</sup> See <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vet/swl-vet/Pages/Index.aspx>

<sup>27</sup> The Victorian Government's Head Start program, commenced in 2019, now operates in over one hundred schools. See <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/headstart.aspx>

<sup>28</sup> 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/>

## Promote traineeships and innovation in employment-based training

By their nature, traineeships require less time to complete than apprenticeships (typically, 2 years), and can be acquired with 'entry-level' qualifications (typically certificate levels II–III). This combination makes the traineeship a useful option for disadvantaged cohorts as they can gain a foothold in employment, while acquiring technical as well as life skills, and maintaining a pathway to full and/or higher qualifications.<sup>29</sup>

Traineeships can be tailored for local contexts and for specific cohorts. One such model is the Brotherhood's Community Safety and Information Service (see box below). Designed to provide training and employment in and around the public housing estates of inner Melbourne, it features strong employer partnerships and supported learning arrangements.

### **The Brotherhood of St Laurence's Community Safety and Information Service**

The CSIS program hires mainly public housing tenants, many of whom are long-term unemployed, as paid trainees to provide a friendly concierge service at the Collingwood, Fitzroy and Richmond public housing estates and gain qualifications in security operations. Trainees in CSIS complete Certificates II and III, attend weekly classroom training and undertake a year-long practical work placement in the reception areas of the estates' high-rise towers. Here they provide access control, information and referral services to local residents. Graduates of the program are supported into employment by a dedicated field officer. For 15 years the CSIS has maintained ongoing employment rates of graduates at above 70 per cent. It is supported by the Victorian Government and partners with MSS Security, SECUREcorp, David Jones, Unified Security, NSA Security and Wilson Security so trainees can access jobs in the industry. <https://www.bsl.org.au/services/work-and-learning/community-safety-and-information-service/>

While traineeships have historically been associated with low-skilled service occupations, the current COVID-19 crisis has generated a need for skill pathways that enable young people to combine training and employment in other high-growth occupations. Traineeships should, for example, be increased and promoted in health care and social assistance, educational services, and transport and logistics. Collaboration between, and support from, employer and industry associations, trade unions, training providers, Group Training Organisations and other networks is essential to establish the guidelines and expectations of such adaptation.<sup>30</sup>

### **Recommendations: Promote employment and workplace-based training**

7. Lift expectations of schools and training organisations to arrange workplace experience.
8. Expand the Head Start model.
9. Promote pre-apprenticeship models that include in their design broader career exploration.
10. Promote traineeships and innovation in employment-based training.

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<sup>29</sup> We accept that recent research suggests that SBATs have better completion rates than post-school traineeships. We do not think that this negates the worth of traineeships. See [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330009658\\_Traineeship\\_completion\\_comparing\\_school-based\\_and\\_post-school\\_provision\\_in\\_Australia/link/5c299978299bf12be3a356b4/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330009658_Traineeship_completion_comparing_school-based_and_post-school_provision_in_Australia/link/5c299978299bf12be3a356b4/download)

<sup>30</sup> Atkinson, G 2016, *Work-based learning and work-integrated learning: fostering engagement with employers*, NCVET, Adelaide.

## 6. Align the skills and jobs agendas through community-wide, place-based responses

### Employers should be more involved in vocational training

There continues to be a misalignment between skills acquired through vocational education, and the skills needed in the contemporary workplace. The involvement of employers and the broader community—including sporting groups and community service organisations—is vital in assisting young people in particular to reflect on their preferences and establish goals that are most likely to lead to employment.

Our Group Training Organisation experience shows that the ideal conditions for ensuring employer involvement include clear aims and timeframes, a light paperwork load and ability to shape the workplace experience. Employers need information that will help them understand a young person's transition between the workplace and classroom. They need guidance about the scope of their involvement, and the students' needs and expectations.

### Enabling bodies must play a role in connecting education, training and employment

Diverse sectors need to work together to make coordinated place-based investment in people as they transition between employment, education and training.

In its enabling role within a national Transition to Work Community of Practice and the National Youth Employment Body, the Brotherhood is testing frameworks that recruit employers as active participants and co-designers of pathways and opportunities.<sup>31</sup> Through mechanisms such as our National Employer Reference Group and local Community Investment Committees (CICs), the Brotherhood is involving employers as partners to improve learning and employment opportunities for young people. For example, local employers across the NYEB CICs are co-designing youth employment courses with TAFE, while TAFE is exploring flexibility within the national training package framework to tailor courses for young people and industry. Local employers are also being recruited to champion investment in young people by other employers, including through offering work experience or work tasters, hosting site tours or by providing entry-level pathways including internships.

Employers can also be consulted by schools on curricula and syllabi that will best lead to the qualifications needed in specific regions. This frequently involves conversations between industry peak bodies and schools about growth occupations, and how to extend opportunities beyond staples such as hospitality, sport and recreation. Through such initiatives, existing school-based mentorship schemes are more likely to succeed.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Transition to Work evaluation: Bond, S & Keys, D 2020, *Finding that spark: what works to achieve effective employment services for young people?*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic. Also available, on request are NYEB evaluation findings Borlagdan, J, Dunstan, E, Clarke, K & Rudd, R 2020 (unpub.) NYEB emerging findings, Brotherhood of St Laurence

<sup>32</sup> See <https://nyeb.bsl.org.au/>; <https://www.bsl.org.au/services/young-people/transition-to-work/>

**Recommendations: Align the skills and jobs agendas through community-wide, place-based responses**

11. Encourage greater employer, school, TAFE and community representation on place-based Community Investment Committees, and greater involvement in similar enabling initiatives such as the Transition to Work Community of Practice.
12. Resource Community Investment Committees to produce aids, guidelines and materials that will lead to more course co-design and workplace-based training.



## 7. Adopt a performance framework focusing on equity outcomes

### Address deteriorating outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

Trends in VET participation by disadvantaged learners in Victoria are concerning (see Appendix). For example, participation rates for the lowest two SEIFA quintiles have declined sharply: in the 2015–2018 period by 11.3% (quintile 1) and by 15.5% (quintile 2).<sup>33</sup> Between 2016 and 2018 there were falls of 26.1% for VET enrolments of those aged 15–19 years, and 23.7% for those aged 20–24 years. Proportional declines were higher among early school leavers than among Year 12 completers. Only an estimated 40–60% of those enrolled (of all ages) go on to attain their qualification<sup>34</sup>, and of these only roughly 30% go on to work in the occupation for which they have trained.<sup>35</sup> There has also been a marked decline in apprentices and trainees – with commencements dropping a massive 26% since 2014 and completions declining by 47%.<sup>36</sup> Many of the factors leading to poor outcomes are linked to both learning and wellbeing needs.

Policy-makers across Australia have taken a passive approach to improving outcomes for 'equity groups'. Not since the National Agreement on Skills Reform (concluded in 2017) have all the states adopted a purposeful target to reverse declines in equity enrolments.<sup>37</sup>

### Monitor equity group progress in Victoria and use targets to improve disadvantage learner outcomes

To make VET policy in Victoria more purposeful in relation to disadvantaged cohorts, a comprehensive monitoring framework is required—and this should be promoted for national adoption and oversight by the National Skills Commission. This should entail creating an 'equity group' schema and linking it to monitoring and performance targets.<sup>38</sup> The main indicators of performance should be *participation* (via enrolment data), *achievements* (via completion data), and *transitions* (via employment outcomes data). The schema should focus on those:

- of low socioeconomic status (SES) background
- lacking Year 12 or Certificate III attainment
- with disability
- newly arrived and from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities
- second-chance learners (i.e. young/old early school leavers returning after a long absence), those made redundant/retrenched, those involved in the criminal justice system

<sup>33</sup> NCVER 2019, *Total VET students and courses 2018*, NCVER, Adelaide.

<sup>34</sup> NCVER 2018, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: VET program completion rates 2016*, NCVER, Adelaide, [https://www.voced.edu.au/vital\\_node\\_create/ngv\\_80349](https://www.voced.edu.au/vital_node_create/ngv_80349)

<sup>35</sup> Wheelahan, L, Buchanan, J & Yu, S 2015, *Linking qualifications and the labour market through capabilities and vocational streams*, NCVER, Adelaide.

<sup>36</sup> NCVER 2018, *Apprentices and trainees 2018: June quarter – Australia*, NCVER, Adelaide,

<sup>37</sup> Between 2009 and 2014, the National VET Equity Advisory Council reported on progress on equity groups to the COAG Standing Committee on Tertiary Education and Employment (SCOTESE) through an annual National Report on Social Equity in VET, and a VET Equity Outcomes Framework.

<sup>38</sup> Victorian Department of Education and Training Victorian Training Market Snapshot provides a single table glimpse of 'Equitable access', accompanied by brief commentary. <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/training/providers/market/vtmrfull2018.pdf>

- of Indigenous background
- from communities under duress (e.g. ravaged by fire or drought).

This monitoring will show concentrations of high-needs students in various types of training, including:

- pre-employment training (usually for the young)
- retraining (for those retrenched or made redundant)
- upgrading skills training (already employed, but moving).

### Produce an annual statement on equity groups' progress

The Victorian Government should advocate for such a national approach in forums such as the National Cabinet, the Industry and Skills Council, National Skills Commission, the Australian Industry Skills Committee; in ongoing negotiations over the National VET Roadmap; and in the upcoming discussions on renewing the National Agreement on Skills and Workforce Development. The aim should be to require an annual statement on the training progress of equity groups across Australia—against targets—to be produced by the National Skills Commission and tabled to the Australian Industry and Skills Council and the National Cabinet.

#### **Recommendations: Adopt a performance framework focusing on equity outcomes**

13. Adopt a VET system performance framework to monitor outcomes for equity groups, along with targets designed to respond to improve participation, achievement and transition outcomes.
14. Publish an annual statement of progress of equity groups—to be released concurrently with the state's training market report—along with findings to help policy-makers address barriers to participation and completion.
15. Work with the Commonwealth to have a similar framework adopted nationally.

## 8. Strengthen student learning and wellbeing support

### Limit the effect disadvantage has on pathway options

The VET student population includes a large percentage of people who experience difficulties with literacy and numeracy skills, anxiety and confidence, disability, housing stability, social connectedness, safety and security (e.g. family violence), personal finances and finding clear career goals. Social factors are also important—for example, access to transport and to information about education/careers. Many people are affected by the location and low socioeconomic profile of their community, or by the local impact of national economic transformation. Many face multiple barriers simultaneously.<sup>39</sup>

### Lift the expectations of training providers to address the needs of disadvantaged learners

We support a key recommendation of the recent Braithwaite Review of ASQA<sup>40</sup> calling for the standard of learner support offered by training organisations to at least match that required of secondary schools and universities. Key supports include:

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

Addressing literacy and numeracy challenges is particularly important. A 2016 review of 22 policy interventions for low adult literacy and numeracy found benefits in adapting instruction to learners' needs by means of regular assessment (formative assessment); complementary e-learning (blended learning); and contextualisation of basic skills provision both at work and at home (workplace learning and family literacy).<sup>41</sup>

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

<sup>39</sup> Dommers, E, Myconos, G, Swain, L, Yung, S & Clarke K 2017, *Engaging young early school leavers in vocational training*, NCVER, Adelaide.

<sup>40</sup> 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](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/all_eyes_on_quality_-_review_of_the_nvetr_act_2011_report.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> Hendrickje, CW 2016, 'How to motivate adults with low literacy and numeracy skills to engage and persist in learning: a literature review of policy interventions', *International Review of Education*, vol. 62, no. 3, pp. 279–97.

## Adopt a modified Community Service Obligation funding model to cater for high-needs learners<sup>42</sup>

A revised approach to funding of a Community Service Obligation (CSO) by Victoria's TAFEs (and eligible non-TAFE providers) should be considered. Reviews of earlier iterations of the CSO funding for Victoria's TAFEs called for refinements that we endorse, including:<sup>43</sup>

- specifying the target 'equity groups' covered
- 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. 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 students encountering significant barriers to education.<sup>44</sup>

## Improve pathways outcomes for young people with disability

School completion rates, further and higher educational attainment rates, workforce participation and employment rates for young people with disability are poor. We acknowledge the importance of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the recent School Leaver Employment Supports that 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.<sup>45</sup> Our research has found that disability employment services are not adequately attuned to the needs of young people, and adopt a similar 'work first' approach to jobactive providers, with little assistance for social skill building.

A recent House of Representatives Inquiry (2018)<sup>46</sup> recommended expanding the Ticket to Work initiative, now funded only by philanthropy and a contribution from the Victorian Government. It features partnerships with many institutions such as TAFEs and universities, and represents a strong bridge between study and work. It currently operates in four regions in Victoria—Western

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<sup>42</sup> 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.

<sup>43</sup> 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](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/VET_Funding_Review.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.skillslinktraining.com.au/community-services.php>

<sup>45</sup> Cross, M 2020, *Who gets what where: review of government funded youth employment programs across Australia*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic.

<sup>46</sup> 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](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>.

and Northern suburbs, Hume, Geelong, and the Frankston/Mornington Peninsula—and should be expanded throughout the state.

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

The Ticket to Work initiative is designed to prepare senior secondary students with disability 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 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/>)

**Promote innovation and collaboration in training and services: Education First Youth Foyers as exemplars**

For young people, homelessness or housing insecurity often means their education is severely disrupted. Around two-thirds of the 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 on Victorian TAFE campuses.

**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.<sup>47</sup> <https://www.bsl.org.au/services/young-people/youth-foyers/>

**Support specialist VCAL providers catering for disadvantaged students**

A Victorian Auditor-General's Office analysis of student completion rates showed that 37% of VCAL students were from the lowest SES quartile, and 31% from the lower-middle quartile.<sup>48</sup> Many need intensive support if they are to overcome hardship and succeed in education and beyond.

<sup>47</sup> Evaluations show that young people moving out of the Foyer have higher rates of Year 12 completion; higher educational qualifications; better housing situations; better mental health, and confidence in managing housing and finances; better social connections, and can better navigate housing systems.

<sup>48</sup> Victorian Auditor-General's Office analysis, *2011 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development data*. <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/student-completion-rates?section=30800>

Brotherhood research shows that small, specialist VCAL providers are very well placed to realise the VCAL's potential, particularly for 'high-needs' cohorts.<sup>49</sup> Students at specialised VCAL providers such as the Brotherhood's David Scott School thrive when provided with tailored learning, wellbeing and career guidance support. The students have reported that undertaking the certificate in a supportive environment—where the curriculum and applied learning components were supplemented with specialist learning and wellbeing supports—increased their confidence, motivation, positive outlook and understanding of and respect for others.

**The Brotherhood of St Laurence's David Scott School: for young people with disrupted education**

The David Scott School in Frankston delivers the VCAL to over 100 young people who have found mainstream schooling unsatisfactory, and/or who have experienced significant hardship. The majority of this 'high-needs' cohort have been expelled or 'exited' from other schools. A 75% attendance rate is impressive in this context.<sup>50</sup> The school delivers individualised programs prioritising cutting-edge applied learning. Project-based learning is combined with accredited vocational training and workplace experience.

Alongside the classroom teachers are teams dedicated to student and family support, and pathways and transition guidance. Youth coaches work with pathways officers to help young people advance their career aspirations, seek out opportunities and strengthen relationships with their community, schools and local specialist youth services. The school works closely with the local Transition to Work service and the regional Community Investment Committee—featuring strong employer involvement—and other supports such as the Victorian Government funded Reconnect program. (<https://www.davidscottschool.vic.edu.au/>)

## Improve VCAL outcomes by introducing a common vocational preparation program for Foundation level students

Completion rates of Foundation level VCAL—across all VCAL provider types—are well below those of Intermediate and Senior (55.6%, 72.4%, and 85.8% respectively); with females faring worse (36% Foundation level completion).<sup>51</sup> This level of the VCAL, catering for the younger students at a borderline Year 10–11, presents a number of challenges for VCAL providers and students, stemming mainly from students' lack of understanding of their preferences and goals, and of employer and training organisation expectations.

A common accredited course—delivered internally—should be promoted that is tailored for the Foundation level VCAL students. While the course chosen should be oriented towards improving non-technical skills, it should also have clear vocational pathways. Examples include the:

- Certificate 1 in Skills for Vocational Pathways (National Course Code: FSK10213)
- Certificate 1 in Access to Vocational Pathways (NCC: FSK10113)
- Certificate 1 in Developing Independence (NCC: 22333VIC, see below).

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<sup>49</sup> Myconos, G 2014, *Lessons from a flexible learning program: the Brotherhood of St Laurence Community VCAL education program for young people 2010–2013*.

<sup>50</sup> My School website, the David Scott School, <https://www.myschool.edu.au/school/52481/attendance/2018> (2019 data in process)

<sup>51</sup> Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2019, *Senior secondary certificate statistical information 2018*, <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/statistics/2019/2019SeniorSecondaryCompletionandAchievementInformation.pdf>

**The Brotherhood of St Laurence's Certificate 1 in Developing Independence (DI)**

The DI designed by the Brotherhood has been conducted with young people who have experienced disadvantage, including to those at risk of homelessness (residing in Education First Youth Foyers), those in out-of-home care and those who are justice-connected. It nurtures planning and goal-setting capabilities across the themes of education, employment, health and wellbeing, social connections, housing and living skills, and civic participation. It helps young people to clarify their goals and establish interpersonal and social networks. It is based on the ethos of Advantaged Thinking, focusing on positive investment in young people, developing their assets and co-creating solutions to help them to achieve independent adulthood. The DI is typically co-delivered over 180 hours by a qualified trainer and a youth support worker to young people between 16 and 25 years. Such co-delivery enables links to be nurtured between the worlds of employment, education, training and community supports.

**Recommendations: Strengthen student learning and wellbeing support**

16. Implement Braithwaite Review recommendations calling for RTOs to provide the same level of student support as do schools and universities, and compel providers to have in place processes to provide stronger access to expert support services beyond the VET system.
17. Adopt an enhanced Victorian Community Service Obligation funding model to help TAFEs and eligible RTOs to better cater for high-needs students.
18. Expand the Ticket to Work program linking learners with disability to further employment and education opportunities.
19. Fund Education First Youth Foyers, and similar innovations in training-based support.
20. Introduce and fund a vocational preparation course for Foundation level VCAL students.

## 9. Promote learner mobility and access to new training options

### Tailor training products to suit changing career circumstances and broad occupational clusters

Only about 30% of those that undertake vocational training go on to work in the occupation for which they have trained.<sup>52</sup> While many factors lead to this poor outcome, one factor is the rigidity of competency-based training and training packages. This is a concern given the changing labour market conditions, and the impact of COVID-19. The Brotherhood regards the current qualification framework, and particularly Certificates II–IV, as the backbone of a more varied suite of products. We see the introduction of more foundational skill sets and some micro-credentials as necessary to help learners adapt more quickly to changing circumstances.

### Promote skill sets that allow early entry into sectors experiencing rapid growth

The COVID-19 crisis has prompted urgent calls for adaptations to existing training products, including changed modes of delivery and timelines for qualification completion. Important innovations in training product design show the potential for use of skill sets that are nested in, but that do not replace, existing qualifications.

One notable recent development is the endorsement by the Australian Industry and Skills Committee of new training products—the Entry to Care Roles Skills Set, and the Infection Control Skill Set—that will enable access to aged and disability services for learners that are not undertaking a full qualification.<sup>53</sup> The Brotherhood calls for more of this skill-set endorsement to enable learners to gain quicker access to employment, while building a career path with links to further accredited training. An important caveat applies: that promotion of skill sets should not undermine efforts to promote full qualifications.

### Promote targeted and high-quality micro-credentials

Consideration should be given to how the current range of training products can be supplemented by some micro-credentials, which currently encompass formal/accredited and informal/non-accredited training products.<sup>54</sup> These credentials could help existing workers respond to changes in the demand for skills, to move between specific jobs and across industries, and forge pathways to broader 'occupational clusters'. They would also help people to continue lifelong learning as their circumstances change.

Again, important caveats apply to the promotion of micro-credentials. The Brotherhood supports the use of *credit bearing* products that:

- are aligned to qualification levels and are delivered with robust assessment processes
- are strongly related to work and to work opportunities across 'occupational clusters'

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<sup>52</sup> National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2018, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: VET program completion rates 2016*, NCVER, Adelaide; Wheelahan, L, Buchanan, J & Yu, S 2015, *Linking qualifications and the labour market through capabilities and vocational streams*, NCVER, Adelaide.

<sup>53</sup> See <https://www.aisc.net.au/content/communiques-and-training-package-updates>

<sup>54</sup> Oliver, B 2019, *Making micro-credentials work for learners, employers and providers*, Deakin University, <http://dteach.deakin.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/103/2019/08/Making-micro-credentials-work-Oliver-Deakin-2019-full-report.pdf>



- are endorsed by industry, Industry Reference Committees, the VRQA and/or AQFA
- are listed on searchable websites such as the Victorian Skills Gateway.

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

Despite widespread consensus on the importance of 'soft skills', a common definition remains elusive. A multitude of interchangeable terms are used in discussions about supplementing technical or formal skills with general or foundational skills (e.g. 'soft skills', 'core skills for work', 'employability skills', 'future skills', 'generic skills', 'capabilities'). Soft skills development—whether through stand-alone courses, or components thereof—should be more consistent across secondary and vocational education settings. Soft skills ought to be accorded significant value towards formal qualifications.

Various educational and training frameworks can inform common curricula for soft skills. For example, in the secondary school context:

- the national middle years F–10 curriculum identifies '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'.
- VCAL (Years 11–12) includes literacy and numeracy skills, personal development, industry-specific skills (accredited VET), and work-related skills.

### Remove obstacles to movement between vocational and tertiary education

Students should be encouraged to explore vocational education without closing other options. There is great merit in recommendations made in the recent Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework aimed at improving movement between senior secondary, vocational and university education.<sup>55</sup> We believe the Victorian Government should fully support the implementation of two recommendations in particular:

- Create a credit point system to which all educational institutions can refer to assess applications for entry from students of diverse educational backgrounds.
- Develop guidelines in the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy that facilitate recognition of shorter form credentials for credit transfer across education sectors.

#### **Recommendations: Promote learner mobility and access to new training options**

21. Promote more flexible training products—including skill sets and micro-credentials—which are industry-endorsed and that maintain a line of sight to employment.
22. Establish a common definition of 'soft skills' and then a consistent approach to such skills development and assessment across school and VET curricula.
23. Implement an AQF Review recommendation to introduce a common credit point system—recognising VET qualifications and short-form credentials—for easier movement between VET and universities.

<sup>55</sup> See <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-qualifications-framework-review-0>

## 10. Foster a skilled applied learning workforce

### Within teacher training, better equip teachers in applied learning

Applied learning carries relatively little status within mainstream schools and teacher training institutions. Most teaching graduates have little understanding of applied learning, or of formal vocational training. While many are enthused with the prospect of teaching within school-based VCAL, few have been equipped by their formal training with the skills to teach relevant, hands-on and applied content.<sup>56</sup>

Such training is particularly important for VCAL teachers. The skills required relate to instructional, applied, portfolio and interest-based learning; engagement skills and relationship building; as well as facilitating exposure to the 'outside world', with industry, experts and community figures.

The approach taken by teacher training institutions is critical to overcoming the inherent bias—within and beyond the teaching profession—against applied learning.

#### **An exemplar teacher training course: La Trobe University's Bachelor of Technology Education**

La Trobe University's Bachelor of Technical Education, a four-year degree, equips professionals from industry to teach Tech studies (in Design, Food and Systems Engineering) across the Year 7–12 curriculum, including subjects for preparatory VET. It covers 'teaching diverse learners', 'literacy and numeracy development', 'inclusive learning environments', 'supporting special needs of learners', 'models of applied learning', and 'human development and wellbeing'. See <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/courses/bachelor-of-technology-education>

### Invest more in VET teacher education and career progression

As dual professionals, VET teachers must have expertise and qualifications derived from their industry or profession, as well as educational skills in applied learning and student support which they then deploy in their teaching roles at the training setting, and in workplaces.

A significant investment is needed to raise the vocational teaching capacity to deliver high-quality learning and to support learners—particularly those with high needs—to negotiate emerging labour market demands, develop sustainable pathways into tertiary education and participate fully in society.

The important role that VET plays in 'second-chance' learning means that VET teachers must also develop effective strategies to assist these students, many with complex and challenging needs. Currently VET teachers must rely on the skills gained from the 'entry-level' Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, which itself is based on the rigid competency training requirements.

The Victorian Government should encourage collaboration between universities, TAFEs and the Victorian VET Development Centre to develop a teaching qualification and skills development framework that will underpin and support the VET teaching workforce into the future.

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<sup>56</sup> Brown, M & O'Reilly-Briggs, K 2017, *The teacher education of VET in Schools (VETiS) teachers*, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Vic.

That framework should build on the existing Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, supplementing it with modules that pave the way for specialisation and recognition across the sector (including secondary schooling).

Phased supplementary accreditation should enable VET teachers to learn and apply high level theories of teaching and assessment, and to deepen and update specialised industry and subject knowledge. This will equip them to teach diverse cohorts across qualifications, accredited courses, micro-credentials, and learning settings (off and on the job) and modes of delivery. Initial accreditation and subsequent professional development should thus be geared towards career progression and upskilling.

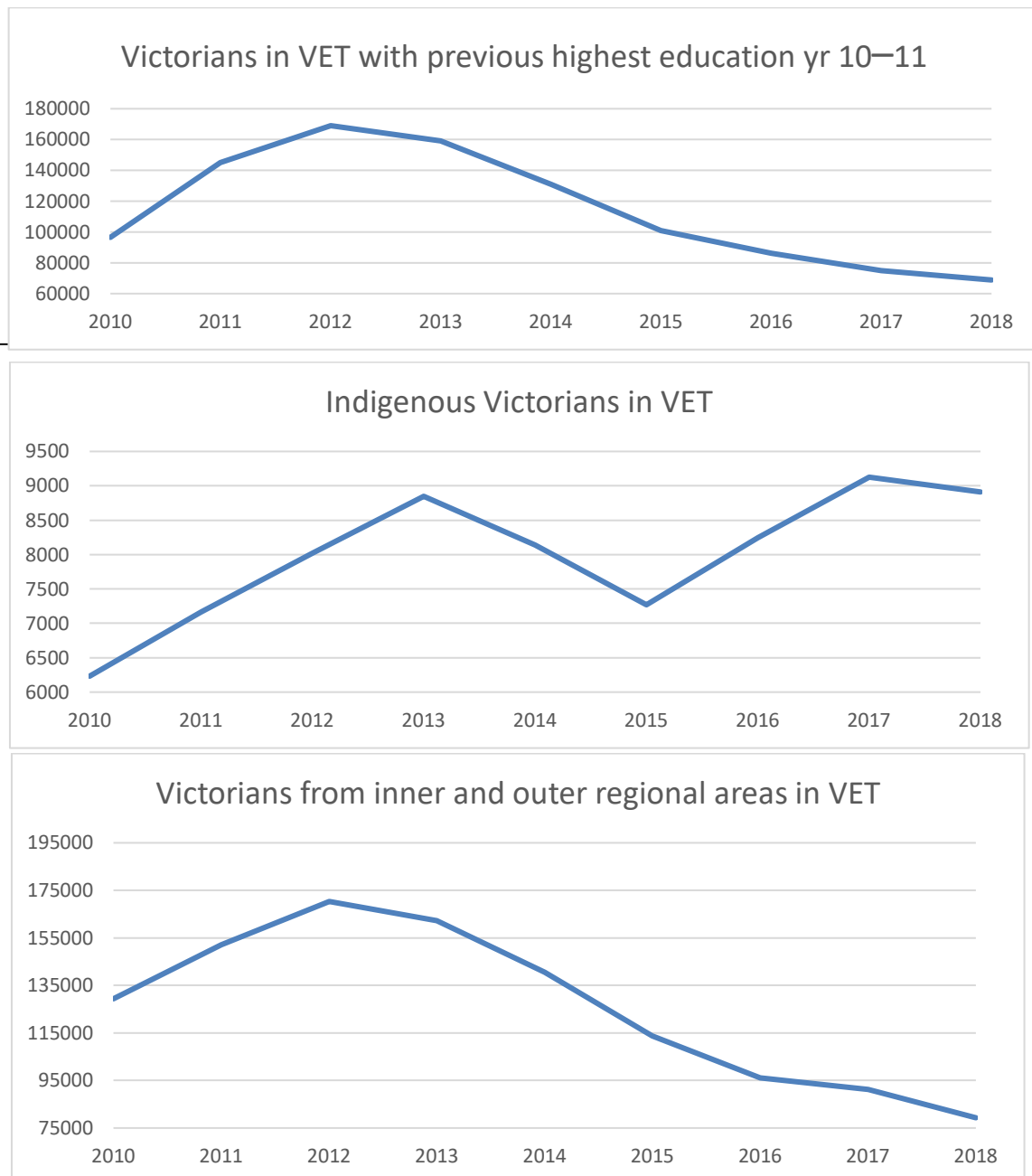
**Recommendations: Foster a skilled applied learning workforce**

24. Provide incentives to teacher training institutions to offer degree-level programs that equip teachers to switch between 'instructional' and 'applied' learning.
25. Promote collaboration between universities, TAFEs and the Victorian VET Development Centre to develop a revised VET teaching qualification and skills development framework.

## Appendix

### Victorian participation trends in government-funded VET of 'equity groups': 2010–2018<sup>57</sup>

Note: These figures are *not* population-adjusted. Victoria's population grew 15.3% from 2010 (5.55 million) to 2018 (6.4 million).<sup>58</sup> In that period enrolments in VET fell 21% (from 390,800 to 308,500). Accordingly, the following charts significantly understate the real decline.



<sup>57</sup> NCVER VOCSTATS, *Government funded students and courses, VET program enrolments, Victoria, 2003-2018*, accessed 26 November 2019

<sup>58</sup> ABS *Australian demographic statistics*, Cat. no. 3235.0, Dec 2010 and Dec 2018,

