



An Aspirational Vocational and Applied Learning System

VCOSS Submission to the Review of
Vocational & Applied Learning in Senior
Secondary Schooling

April 2020

The Victorian Council of Social Service is the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria.

VCOSS members reflect the diversity of the sector and include large charities, peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups and individuals interested in social policy.

In addition to supporting the sector, VCOSS represents the interests of Victorians experiencing poverty and disadvantage, and advocates for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society.

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VCOSS acknowledges the traditional owners of country and pays respect to past, present and emerging Elders.

This document was prepared on the lands of the Kulin Nation.



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Introduction

Victoria is on a journey to “*build a world-class education system and transform Victoria into the Education State*”¹.

The Victorian Government’s *Review into Vocational and Applied Learning in Senior Secondary Schooling* is an opportunity to ensure that the system transformation taking place in secondary schools is responsive to the diverse needs, preferences and aspirations of Victorian learners.

A responsive, future-focused system is one that provides young people with a **variety** of flexible options, experiences and career pathways while they are at school (or undertaking secondary-level education in an equivalent learning environment), and sets them up to make a successful transition to life beyond the school gate.

It is important that these options, experiences and pathways are inclusive of high-quality vocational and applied learning. Vocational and applied learning has relevance to **all** Victorian learners. However, the provision of vocational and applied learning in schools (and in the community, through flexible learning organisations), is **also** an important strategy for **preventing** education disengagement and early school leaving, and facilitating a pathway **back** for those who have left.

While students disengage from school for a variety of reasons, for some students the precipitating factors include:

- Experiencing a disconnect between **what** they are taught (and/or **how** they are taught), and their interests and aspirations
- Insufficient support to address complex personal barriers to learning.

A key strength of vocational and applied learning is that it offers students the flexibility to pursue their interests, and to work at a pace that meets their needs. This flexible pace is particularly beneficial for students whose participation and engagement in learning may be impacted by their experience of homelessness, family violence, neglect, abuse or other trauma, mental ill-health or disability.

¹ Department of Education and Training, About the Education State, <<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/educationstate/Pages/vision.aspx>>, accessed 28 April 2020.

Another key strength of vocational and applied learning is access to on-the-job experience and industry exposure. Students gain an insight into potential career pathways, while learning practical skills that they can apply to future studies, training or work.

This is highly relevant to the ‘future of work’ policy conversations that currently occupy the Victorian and Commonwealth governments, the education and training sector, employers and unions, as well as young people and their families/carers and advocates. VCOSS notes that this Review is taking place at a time when:

- It is estimated that young people may have up to 17 jobs over five careers² in their lifetime.
- Employers are seeking graduates/new workers with complex skills (sometimes referred to as ‘soft skills’ or ‘21st century skills’), including adaptability, problem solving and critical thinking to be able to transition between jobs.
- There is significant future job growth in skilled industries, including the community services industry.

Given the severe economic shock and social dislocation caused by COVID-19, which is having – and will continue to have – a disproportionate impact on young people entering the labour market for the first time, it is more important than ever that the education system adequately prepares young people for their future by providing them with the skills, training and experience they need to engage in meaningful employment and other opportunities.

This submission focuses on the ways in which vocational and applied learning can prepare all young people for their future, and in particular, meet the needs of disadvantaged young people.

² Foundation for Young Australians, *The New Work Order*, 2015.

Recommendations

Design and reputation

- Ensure flexibility remains a key component of vocational and applied learning so students can remain actively engaged
- Keep the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior levels of VCAL, but consider applying more flexibility to the Foundation level
- Provide access to wrap-around supports for students experiencing disadvantage
- Expand access to the Program for Students with Disability and move to a new strengths-based functional needs assessment funding model
- Expand the Navigator program to support young people to stay engaged in school
- Remove dual enrolment eligibility restrictions for young people at school who want to do a VET course outside of VETiS, so they can access Skills First funding
- Develop students' complex skills and practical skills while they are at school
- Give all students access to industry exposure starting from Grade 5 or Grade 6
- Give all students access to industry experience, including Structured Workplace Learning (SWL)
- Provide students with regular access to a support worker both inside and outside the classroom, when undertaking VETiS and SWL.
- Provide students undertaking SBATs, SWL or other workplace learning experiences with a mentor where the student, school or host employer identifies the student would benefit from this additional support.
- Redesign the way in which partnerships between industry, employers and the education system works
- Motivate industry and employers to have a stake in providing students with exposure and experience
- Boost the understanding, value and reputation of VCAL by creating clear career pathways and opportunities
- Provide schools with more career practitioners

Delivery

- Fully fund vocational and applied learning in school and community settings
- Enable all students to equitably access VETiS, SWL and workplace learning experiences by ensuring schools have funding to address transport disadvantage for their student cohort

- Offer blended learning for rural and regional students and ensure teachers are appropriately trained to deliver this model
- Provide tailored support for students with disability to undertake vocational and applied learning, including reasonable adjustments and career advice
- Provide tailored and individualised support for young people in the juvenile justice system
- Use government funding to enable VET providers to develop and deliver courses that meet industry needs in rural and regional areas, including delivery of courses for VETiS and SBAT students.
- Include applied learning as a proficiency in teaching degrees
- Schools should provide adequate opportunities for teachers to ensure their skills and knowledge are up to date
- Provide teachers with access to training and information to meet the needs of students

Outcomes

- Prioritise and capture outcomes that assist students to achieve complex skills and life skills

Objectives of applied learning

The Victorian Government's Consultation Paper asks what the objectives of applied learning should be.

VCOSS believes that the primary objectives of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), VET in Schools (VETiS) and School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs) should be to ensure that students, especially those who experience disadvantage and vulnerability, have access to:

- A variety of flexible pathways to complete secondary school
- A variety of learning options to suit their needs and aspirations
- Structured workplace learning and other forms of industry exposure and experience, so that they can acquire a range of 21st century skills and have a strong foundation from which to secure 'jobs of the future'.

Design and reputation

Vocational and applied learning presents significant opportunities for both students and employers. These opportunities are deeply connected to the **design** and **reputation** of vocational and applied learning pathways.

Enhancing the design and reputation of vocational and applied learning will help to increase the numbers of students accessing opportunities such as Structured Workplace Learning. This is an appropriate reform objective, particularly in the context of preparing young people for the 'future of work'. However, it will be important not to lose sight of disadvantaged learners who have traditionally been a priority cohort for vocational and applied learning.

This section of the submission identifies opportunities to enhance design and reputation, including opportunities to increase the engagement of students who have disconnected from learning, and to bring forward the window for early intervention programs for those who are at risk of disengaging. This work needs to start from the 'middle years'³ onwards.

Certificate considerations

The Victorian Government's consultations have considered the merits – or otherwise – of combining the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) into a single certificate (with both vocational and academic pathways).

VCOSS members have told us that they would face significant barriers to their continued provision of VCAL if it were combined into a single certificate with the VCE.

They describe the application process to provide VCE as difficult and onerous, and advise that many high-quality community providers would not have the size, funding, staffing structures or resources to successfully register.

Should the two certificates be combined, this would likely mean a host of providers who currently provide Community VCAL would be unable to register, under current registration processes. The potential loss of these providers from the system is a significant risk to government and the community, given that many Community VCAL providers prioritise the re-engagement of disadvantaged young people who have disconnected from mainstream schools and support them to complete secondary education.

³ 'Middle years' generally refers to children and young people between the ages of 9 to 12 or 9 to 14.

Consequently, VCOSS advocates for the retention of both certificates, to protect against this risk. That said, we **do** believe there is merit in exploring reforms that enable more flexibility and permeability between the VCAL and VCE. All students would benefit from having access to learning and work experiences that sit outside the pathway they are on.

Support students to thrive

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure flexibility remains a key component of vocational and applied learning so students can remain actively engaged
- Keep the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior levels of VCAL, but consider applying more flexibility to the Foundation level
- Provide access to wrap-around supports for students experiencing disadvantage
- Expand access to the Program for Students with Disability and move to a new strengths-based functional needs assessment funding model
- Expand the Navigator program support young people to stay engaged in school
- Remove dual enrolment eligibility restrictions for young people at school who want to do a VET course outside of VETiS, so they can access Skills First funding
- Develop students' complex skills and practical skills while they are at school

Continue to embed flexibility in vocational and applied learning

Flexibility is a key component of VCAL in both course design and delivery. It is also one of its greatest strengths.

It enables teachers to adapt to their students' learning needs and to align and integrate learning with students' interests. This flexibility is often characterised as "*meeting students*

where they are at”, and VCOSS members report that it provides a richness to the VCAL certificate that differs significantly from VCE.

Flexibility in course design and delivery enables students to direct their energy and efforts into areas of study that are meaningful to them. For example, if a student is interested in the hospitality industry and is undertaking a project on a café, teachers can increase relevance to the student by incorporating numeracy into the work by learning how many coffees were sold in a day and then working out how many beans were needed to make that many coffees.

This can help increase a young person’s motivation and engagement in their learning environment, and build an aspirational mindset – important foundations for post-school transitions.

In community-based settings, flexible course design and delivery are often accompanied by flexible wellbeing supports that ‘wrap around’ a student, depending on their needs. These wellbeing supports enhance student outcomes (both academic and social). They provide important insights into wellbeing that could assist mainstream schools to enhance the support they provide to students, and help to prevent suspensions and expulsions of vulnerable young people from school. More detail on this is provided later in this submission.

Case Study:

Melbourne City Mission’s independent school The Hester Hornbrook Academy provides flexible learning to students who have disengaged from mainstream school environments and “present with a mix of mental health issues, homelessness, drug and alcohol use, juvenile justice exposure, family breakdown and/or very low personal agency and social capital.”⁴

⁴ R Broadbent, K Hart, T Paapadopoulos, *The Hester Hornbrook Academy Classroom Youth Worker Research Project*, Final Report, Victoria University, July 2019.

Flexibility enables the Academy to tailor their approach to VCAL to meet the needs of individual students by programming learning around a student's goals, and their own pace, and in ways that accommodate students' changing circumstances⁵. This can help motivate students who are better able to direct their learning, focus on areas of interest or personal strengths, and feel secure in knowing that potential setbacks can be overcome through continued course flexibility.

Maintain current VCAL levels

Maintaining the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior VCAL levels is important in ensuring young people can access vocational and applied learning regardless of what their starting point is.

Students experiencing disadvantage and, in particular, those who may be reengaging in education after a significant period of absence, need access to a range of options that suit their needs and will accommodate their level of learning.

VCOSS members advise that some changes to the Foundation level could support further retention and progression of students experiencing disadvantage. For cohorts of highly disadvantaged young people who may have disengaged from education for a significant period of time or face other complex barriers to meaningfully engage in education, even greater flexibility should be applied to the Foundation level.

At this Foundation level, a range of opportunities need to be available to students from the perspective of a flexible, person-centred approach. This level of flexibility could include reviewing the required 100 hours of VET activity. For example, removing this requirement for those students for whom this may not be conducive to supporting their wellbeing, particularly if they need to attend an off-site RTO without the familiarity and support of their usual learning environment. Another option could be to integrate existing VET Certificate I or preparatory courses into this VCAL level. VCOSS members report that some young people beginning VCAL at Foundation level may benefit from a more structured opportunity to learn life skills and social development that this option could provide, and better prepare them for, Intermediate and Senior VCAL.

⁵ K Te Riele, M Davies & A Baker, *Passport to a Positive Future: Evaluation of the Melbourne Academy*, The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning, 2015.

Help students get the support they need in mainstream educational settings

The Victorian Government's Consultation Paper remarks that: *"The Review has heard that VCAL plays an important role in providing pathways for students with special needs or in special settings, and students reengaging with education."*

This observation accords with VCROSS's insights. As noted earlier in this submission, the flexible course design and delivery is a major contributing factor. However, the other significant factor is that Community VCAL providers, in particular, have embedded high-quality, flexible and holistic wellbeing supports into their delivery model.

VCROSS is concerned that all students receive – as needed – appropriate wellbeing supports through their education provider, in order to establish and/or sustain their preferred education pathway. Students who wish to undertake VCE should not feel compelled to choose Community VCAL because they fear their wellbeing needs won't otherwise be met. All young people experiencing disadvantage should be provided with holistic, wrap-around supports to overcome barriers to meaningfully engaging in education.

Schools are an important environment for young people to build protective factors to mitigate against stressors and poor health outcomes. Schools can be places where young people feel socially connected, build strong relationships with peers and teachers, and develop a sense of their strengths and skills⁶.

However, schools can also be challenging environments for young people who experience bullying, have been exposed to trauma or who have a mental illness. Mission Australia's annual Youth Survey reflected this, with Victorian young people identifying coping with stress, mental health and school or study problems as the top three issues of personal concern⁷.

Research suggests that significant numbers of young people have been exposed to a traumatic event⁸, and approximately half of all serious mental health issues in adulthood begin before the age of 14⁹. Young people who live in out-of-home care, who are under youth justice supervision, are refugees, are experiencing homelessness, are LGBTIQ, or

⁶ Victorian Department of Education and Training, *The State of Victoria's Children Report: A focus on health and wellbeing 2017*, 2019.

⁷ E Carlisle, J Fildes, S Hall, B Perrins, A Perdriau & J Plummer, *Youth Survey Report 2019*, Mission Australia, 2019.

⁸ S Bendall, A Phelps, V Browne, O Metcalf, J Cooper, B Rose, J Nurse & N Fava, *Trauma and young people. Moving toward trauma-informed services and systems*, Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, 2018.

⁹ Beyond Blue, *Mental health conditions in children*, <<https://healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au/age-6-12/mental-health-conditions-in-children>>, accessed 11 March 2020.

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people are more likely to experience trauma¹⁰. When social disadvantaged is coupled with experiences of trauma, such as family violence or child abuse, it can significantly increase the negative outcomes for young people's wellbeing¹¹.

The health and wellbeing of young people is vital to their ability to remain engaged in school, perform well academically, build strong social connections, and transition successfully into post-school pathways¹². For young people experiencing disadvantage or who are more likely to have experienced trauma, additional supports are needed to overcome barriers to participation, learning and attainment.

Young people who are at-risk should be provided with access to comprehensive wrap-around supports to ensure they can thrive at school and meaningfully engage in education.

In particular:

- Programs such as the Victorian Government's Mental Health Practitioners in Secondary Schools¹³ are a great start to supporting young people in their school environment. More comprehensive and intensive support should be offered to young people who experience disadvantage so they can overcome barriers to engaging in learning. These supports could include youth workers, allied health professionals, housing and homelessness support, and legal support¹⁴ on a more intensive basis. Schools as community hubs are particularly successful in providing these essential supports to students and families as they co-locate wrap-around services, ensuring better access¹⁵.
- Innovative models could be explored and adopted in mainstream settings, as well as community settings, to support students that need it most. It is critical that these supports be extended to students enrolled in mainstream schools but who are receiving their VCAL education through a Community VCAL provider such as a Learn Local. VCOSS members report difficulties accessing these supports for students in these circumstances.

¹⁰ S Bendall, A Phelps, V Browne, O Metcalf, J Cooper, B Rose, J Nursey & N Fava, *Trauma and young people. Moving toward trauma-informed services and systems*, Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, 2018.

¹¹ Victorian Department of Education and Training, *The State of Victoria's Children Report: A focus on health and wellbeing 2017*, 2019.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Victorian Department of Education and Training, Mental health practitioners in secondary schools, <<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/Pages/mental-health-practitioners-secondary.aspx>>, accessed 11 March 2020.

¹⁴ See for example WEstjustice's School Lawyer program, <<https://www.westjustice.org.au/community-development-and-law-reform/community-development-and-law-reform-projects/school-lawyer>>.

¹⁵ See for example, Doveton College.

Innovative models could include onsite access to youth workers. For example, at the Hester Hornbrook Academy, a teacher and youth worker work alongside each other, with smaller in-class teacher to student ratios to support the education and wellbeing needs of young people.

Students surveyed under this model provided overwhelmingly positive feedback of having a youth worker in the classroom. Students agreed the youth worker supported them including in removing personal barriers the students faced, general and personal support, and support with academic work, amongst other things¹⁶.

While there is a continued role for both mainstream and community settings to support disadvantaged young people, more should be done in mainstream settings to support all students to thrive without immediately shifting responsibility to Community VCAL providers to support some of the most disadvantaged students. When mainstream schools do not put appropriate procedures and supports in place for students who are experiencing structural disadvantage, or who have additional learning needs, this places enormous pressure on Community VCAL providers who pick up the pieces.

In striving for a fair, just and equitable system, mainstream schools must do more to support all students and young people to engage in education through access to wrap-around supports.

Support young people to remain engaged in school

With approximately 10,000 young people in Victoria alone disengaging from education each year,¹⁷ existing programs proven to support engagement and reengagement should be expanded. This includes the Program for Students with Disability and Navigator. If these programs are expanded, more young people will be able to access support earlier, helping to minimise gaps in their learning.

Students with disability are at particularly high risk of being excluded from mainstream school due to behavioural issues¹⁸ that often relate to insufficient support.

A 2015 evaluation of the Hester Hornbrook Academy found more than one quarter of students had a disability or illness, with staff suggesting the number may be higher with

¹⁶ R Broadbent, K Hart, T Paapadopoulos, *The Hester Hornbrook Academy Classroom Youth Worker Research Project*, Final Report, Victoria University, July 2019.

¹⁷ Victorian Department of Education and Training, *Greater Returns on Investment in Education: Government Schools Funding Review*, December 2015.

¹⁸ J Watterson & M O'Connell, *Those who disappear: The Australian education problem nobody wants to talk about*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, Report No.1, 2019.

several students likely to have an undiagnosed disability or illness¹⁹. Across Victoria as a whole, approximately 15 per cent of students need reasonable adjustment at school to participate on the same basis as their peers²⁰.

These issues are particularly relevant for vocational and applied learning due to the higher numbers of at-risk or disadvantaged young people who currently choose these pathways.

VCOSS members report ongoing challenges for VCAL include students being disparaged in mainstream schools. This is linked to a perception in schools and in the broader community that VCAL students have poor attendance or poor literacy and numeracy skills. VCOSS members have been very clear that VCAL *inherits* many issues that takes time to deal with, and which with appropriate supports and interventions, could have been minimised *before* students were ready to begin their senior secondary schooling.

While VCAL is, and should be seen as, a certificate for all young people to gain experience in applied learning and access to career opportunities, it is also a critically important option for students with diverse learning needs and students experiencing disadvantage.

Interventions that start earlier and capture more students to ensure they are able to remain engaged in school is *vital* to improving not only the life outcomes for young people, but for the reputation of VCAL.

For students with disability, every student who requires additional support should receive it. This means expanding the Program for Students with Disability, and rolling out a new funding model based on a strengths-based functional needs assessment²¹. Moving away from a medical-needs model and to one that is focused on maximising the abilities and learning of students with disability will help more young people with disability thrive.

The Victorian Government has invested in programs to support young people who have disengaged or who are at risk of disengaging from school, including young people in out-of-home care or who have come into contact with the justice system²².

¹⁹ K Te Riele, M Davies & A Baker, *Passport to a Positive Future: Evaluation of the Melbourne Academy*, The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning, 2015.

²⁰ Victorian Department of Education and Training, *The Education State: Review of the Program for Students with Disabilities*, 2016, p. 30.

²¹ Victorian Department of Education and Training, *The Education State: Review of the Program for Students with Disabilities*, 2016.; Victorian Department of Education and Training, Functional needs assessment pilot, <<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/functional-needs.aspx>>, accessed 6 April 2020.

²² See Victorian Government: LOOKOUT Education Support Centres; Navigator; Springboard; Local Learning and Employment Networks; School Focused Youth Service; Education Justice Initiative and; Hands on Learning.

Schools and community agencies, including VCOSS members, report the Navigator program is making a significant impact in reengaging young people back into an education or training pathway. However, access to the program is constrained with demand for support outstripping supply. Additionally, there is an identified need to broaden the eligibility criteria so the program can bring forward the window for early intervention.

Currently the Navigator program only supports people aged between 12 and 17 who are missing more than 70 per cent of their classes. There is a gap in targeted, high-intensity reengagement programs for children in the 'middle years' despite this being a growing area of concern²³. Eligibility criteria should be loosened and funding boosted to include children as young as 10 who have missed up to 50 per cent of their classes, so that intervention starts earlier.

Doing more to support students to remain engaged in education will reduce some of the issues VCAL 'inherits' by intervening earlier.

Dual enrolment

Current policy settings mean that young people are not able to be enrolled in both school (in a mainstream or flexible learning setting) **and** enrol as a government subsidised (Skills First) student in a VET course (that is if they wish to undertake a VET course outside of VETiS). SBATs are an exception to this rule.

This is a significant constraint and additional barrier for young people who may already be experiencing disadvantage, or be at-risk of disengaging from school. The system needs to have greater flexibility to enable young people to access a range of options that suit their needs and encourage them to remain engaged in education within their school environment, by removing dual enrolment constraints. For example, if students need to leave school to undertake their VET course of choice because they are unable to do so as part of their VCAL or VETiS program, they will not have access to the age appropriate supports available to them in their familiar school settings.

²³ See for example, Whittlesea Youth Commitment, Hume Whittlesea Local Learning & Employment Network, *Middle Years in Whittlesea: A collective response. A municipal middle years strategy for the City of Whittlesea*, 2017.

Case Study:

Matilda* lives in out-of-home care and is completing her VCAL certificate with a flexible learning education provider. Through appropriate support and fostering her interests and aspirations, Matilda wanted to undertake a Cert III in Patisserie at her local TAFE for two days a week, while continuing at her flexible learning provider for three days a week. Matilda wanted to continue at her flexible learning provider to maintain continuity and stability in a familiar environment and to focus on her literacy and numeracy. This would support her study in patisserie. As a young person in out-of-home care, Matilda was eligible for the Skills First Youth Access Initiative²⁴ which means she doesn't have to pay for her vocational course. However, current restrictions prohibit dual enrolments, meaning that Matilda could not remain in her flexible learning setting *and* access the TAFE course through the Skills First Youth Access Initiative, and not pay fees. This policy disconnect does not support young people in their learning aspirations.

*Not real name

VCOSS members report some students may obtain a principal's exemption from school to attend a VET provider in its place, but VCOSS understands this is difficult and not always in the best interests of the young person. Young people should have the option of continuing their education at school while pursuing further training, especially if they face additional barriers.

Embed complex and practical skill development into the school curriculum

For VCAL and VETiS to continue to meet the needs of all students, the curriculum must take into consideration employer, industry and student need. For example, there is growing demand for young adults to have 'complex skills' and practical skills coming into the workforce.

²⁴ Department of Education and Training, Skills First Youth Access Initiative, <<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/Skills-First-Youth-Access-Initiative.aspx>> accessed 7 April 2020.

Schools are not consistently equipping young people with the skills and knowledge they need for the future, despite being an important environment where young people spend a significant amount of time. Schools are well placed to teach and support young people to learn the skills they need beyond literacy and numeracy, such as adaptability, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration.

The future of work is changing, along with the skill sets young people need to succeed. There is growing agreement that schools need to shift their focus beyond academic outcomes and look towards new capabilities such as the ability to respond to opportunities and problems creatively and experimentally²⁵. These are 'complex skills' that are hard to learn and hard to teach (though they are sometimes referred to as 'soft skills' or '21st century skills') and they are becoming increasingly important²⁶.

VCOSS members report disadvantaged young people can miss out on information sharing or 'know how' from family networks to help understand and navigate some of the more practical sides of becoming a young adult. This can include how to behave in a professional environment, working and employment rights and responsibilities, and developing 'complex skills'.

Practical life skills and 'complex skills' should be embedded in the school curriculum to ensure all young people have the opportunity to obtain the tools they need to succeed now and into the future.

Vocational and applied learning is a valuable opportunity for young people to learn these skills with the added benefit of seeing what these skills look like in real world environments, for example when undertaking Structured Workplace Learning. Industry exposure and on-the-job experience also provides young people with an opportunity to learn first-hand employer expectations and how to behave in a professional environment.

Bolster industry exposure and work experience

Exposure to a range of industries and career options, as well as engagement in meaningful work experience is vital for young people to explore their interests and plan for their post-school pathways. Early exposure to practical career activities may also help improve

²⁵ M Anderson, B Hinz, H Matus, *The Paradigm Shifters: Entrepreneurial Learning in Schools*, Research Report, Mitchell Institute Report No. 04/2017, 2017.

²⁶ Deloitte Access Economics, *Soft skills for business success*, DeakinCo., 2017.

student's school engagement and motivation if they can see the connection between school, work and career.

Young people identify 'hands on' experience as extremely valuable in learning about their interests and career pathways and evidence shows "the fewer career development activities young people participate in, the more likely they are to be uncertain about their careers, disengaged from education or training, and unemployed."²⁷

To ensure that vocational and applied learning continues to meet the needs of all students studying in an applied stream, workplace learning and industry exposure should be bolstered to ensure it is meaningful.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, work will need to be done to ensure young people can still access ongoing and meaningful industry exposure and experience to maximise their learning, help informed pathway decisions, and to support engagement and retention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Give all students access to industry exposure starting from Grade 5 or Grade 6
- Give all students access to industry experience, including Structured Workplace Learning
- Provide students with regular access to a support worker both inside and outside the classroom, when undertaking VETiS and SWL
- Provide students undertaking SBATs, SWL or other workplace learning experiences with a mentor where the student, school or host employer identifies the student would benefit from this additional support

Expose young people to different industries

Exposure to a range of industries through immersion programs, activities and experiences starting from late primary school would help build students' knowledge of different opportunities, spark their curiosity and foster aspiration for their future.

²⁷ Parliament of Victoria Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, *Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools*, August 2018.

The Department of Education and Training funds Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) to facilitate student access to Structured Workplace Learning (SWL) placements,²⁸ and has an initiative to offer vulnerable students in years 7 to 10 industry exposure to support meaningful work experience opportunities.²⁹ While these reforms provide a good foundational structure to assist young people to engage in work experience and exposure to industry, they don't start early enough and miss the opportunity of providing students with a breadth of industry knowledge and exposure.

Students need exposure to a range of opportunities relating to different industries starting from as young as Grade 5 or 6 to give students important opportunities to understand what different careers and industries entail, and what the possibilities are, without feeling locked into a career pathway. These opportunities could be tailored to reflect industries in local communities to foster greater community connection. VCOSS members continue to report that young people often do not have a real understanding of what different jobs or careers entail which has a significant impact on their senior secondary pathway choices. As these experiences can help bolster student aspiration, they can also support retention in school. This can help boost the reputation and options young people see through vocational and applied learning pathways.

Case study:

Hume Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network

We run a program for Year 10 students called 'Finding my Place'. As part of the 8-week program, students are taken into an industry setting such as Costa mushroom farm. We do this because there are so many different elements to that industry that helps students expand their understanding of what working in a particular industry looks like. For example, students see there are research elements related to developing the environment to grow, as well as the growing and horticultural aspect. Students then see other elements of the industry such as the packaging, marketing and promotional side.

²⁸ Department of Education and Training, Structured workplace learning, <<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/work/Pages/structuredlearning.aspx>>, accessed 31 March 2020.

²⁹ Department of Education and Training, Transforming career education, <<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/transforming-career.aspx>>, accessed 31 March 2020.

It's a great way of introducing the concept that in any given industry you have a number of different aspects and pathways to choose from.

Emphasise the importance of on the job experience

SWL and on the job training are *not* compulsory for all students undertaking VCAL. While there are strong recommendations for the majority of VETiS courses to include this component, many do not have requirements for SWL.³⁰ In recognising the importance of SWL, schools should prioritise supporting all students who would like to access SWL into these opportunities. To minimise the difficulties navigating, understanding and supporting SWL, schools and host employers should be provided clear SWL guidelines and expectations. These initiatives would go hand in hand in Rethinking Partnerships (refer to page 26 of this submission).

The value of on the job training is significant. It can be an efficient way to teach and to learn, can lead to better alignment with the skills sought after in the workplace or industry, and gives students the opportunity to obtain an understanding of the workplace³¹. As such, all young people undertaking vocational and applied learning should have access to workplace experiences.

VCOSS members report that negotiating student placements for SWL is based on what the hosting organisation is able to afford or commit to. This can mean that placements vary significantly for students and could last anywhere between a couple of days to a 20-week placement. For students who do have the opportunity to engage in SWL, some may be missing out on meaningful work experience if they can only negotiate one or two days of placement.

For students undertaking a course or unit that does not mandatorily require engagement in SWL, these students may be missing out on this opportunity entirely.

More comprehensive frameworks need to be put in place with appropriate resourcing to ensure all young people undertake meaningful work experience so they can learn different skills, get a taste for the workplace and experience first-hand important insights into industry and career pathways.

³⁰ Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, How SWL Works, <<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vet/swl-vet/Pages/HowSWLWorks.aspx>>, accessed 30 March 2020.

³¹ Deloitte Insights, 'The path to prosperity. Why the future of work is human', *Building the Lucky Country* #7, 2019.

While these experiences are important for young people, they can also be overwhelming and hard to navigate. Young people undertaking any form of external training or workplace learning whether it be SWL, through an SBAT, or work experience, should have regular access to a support worker both in and out of the classroom. Acknowledging that not all young people have the confidence to proactively seek support, regular access to a support worker who liaises with each young person would assist with any issues that might crop up. VCOSS members raised concerns about the ability of some employers to adequately support a young person undertaking SWL, and the lag time between the information flowing on to schools, LLENs or Community VCAL providers. These support workers would be well placed to troubleshoot small issues and should be appropriately trained in appropriate referral system to ensure the young person can get the support they need to have a meaningful experience.

Young people who experience additional barriers should also be provided with mentors to support their aspiration and retention. VCOSS members report this would be particularly valuable for young people, including students with disability, those who live in out-of-home care and those who are Aboriginal. A National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) study found a university mentoring program delivered to rural and low socioeconomic status secondary students effectively raised student aspirations to attend university³². The study also suggests similar mentoring projects in both sectors could work together to provide further education pathways for all young people, in both vocational and academic career paths.

In interviewing young people in secondary school, the Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY) found students emphasised “the importance of positivity, acceptance without judgement, genuine listening, and providing guidance based on experience while respecting their autonomy” when identifying an ‘ideal’ support person³³. Mentors could help bridge this role for students experiencing disadvantage, especially where they are able to connect with the lived experience of the young person’s circumstances.

³² Curtis D, et al., Op. Cit., p. 25.

³³ ARACY, *Please Just Say You’re Proud of Me: Perspectives of Young People on Parent Engagement and Doing Well at School*, Canberra, 2019, p.4.

Build the reputation of vocational and applied learning through partnerships

Reforming the way in which industry, employers and the education system work together can support VCAL and VETiS to meet the needs of all students who want to study in an applied stream, while boosting the reputation of vocational and applied learning. This needs to be accompanied by a clearer narrative about career opportunities vocational and applied learning offer.

Vocational and applied learning through VCAL can be enriching and provide young people with robust and lifelong opportunities through the skills, experience and qualifications they gain. Young people are also able to obtain a nationally recognised VET qualification whilst at school, in some instances the level of these courses may lead straight to employment, or they may provide a solid pathway to further education and training post school. Some programs such as Head Start and SBATs also provide opportunities for young people to earn while they learn in school. However, the understanding of these opportunities and the tangible benefits of vocational and applied learning are often misunderstood, not promoted, or simply unknown.

By having stronger relationships between key stakeholders to visibly promote and embed these opportunities and industry exposure, students, families and the broader community will be able to gain a better understanding of the value and benefits of VCAL.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Redesign the way in which partnerships between industry, employers and the education system works
- Motivate industry and employers to have a stake in providing students with exposure and experience
- Boost the understanding, value and reputation of VCAL by creating clear career pathways and opportunities
- Provide schools with more career practitioners

Rethink partnerships

This Review is taking place alongside the *Review into Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy*, and this provides a unique opportunity to reform the way in which connections between schools and education settings, students, employers and industry both meet growing skills shortages while matching careers with student aspirations, strengths and interests.

A reformed system that clearly demonstrates the value of vocational and applied learning, with clear links to career pathways and opportunities would help boost the reputation of VCAL and shift the stigma away from both VCAL and the VET system as VCE and higher education's less desirable counterparts.

Head Start is an existing program that helps connect students with employers and industries and delivers on-the-job training while students complete their schooling³⁴. However, it is not widely accessible and does not reform the vocational and applied learning system as a whole.

Victoria could look both locally and to international models to reimagine the way in which the current dual certificate system in Victorian secondary schools could embed deeper relationships with relevant stakeholders to provide young people with post-school opportunities.

International models in Germany and Switzerland have dual-track training systems that enable young people in secondary school to undertake "in-company training" alongside school education. This means that young people spend between three to four days per week in a company to learn specific skills in that profession, supplemented by several weeks of training from broader industry bodies to fill any gaps in the specialised training, while studying the essentials and theory at school³⁵.

³⁴ Department of Education and Training, Head Start apprenticeships and traineeships, <<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/headstart.aspx>>, accessed 15 April 2020.

³⁵ M Bax, 'How does dual training work?', *Bildungs Perten Netzwerk*, <<https://www.bildungsexperten.net/wissen/wie-funktioniert-eine-duale-ausbildung/>>, accessed 6 April 2020.

If you're not interested in an academic pathway and your strengths lie elsewhere, why not earn a wage while learning and come out of secondary school with a qualification, or close to completing a qualification, while having some money and a career.

Many of the current areas of skill shortages are also future growth areas, with a high demand for workers. A reformed system could motivate business to have a stake in providing students with experience and industry exposure. In Switzerland, for example, the industry sector partners with the state “to develop industry qualifications and assessments, training curriculum, and additional course work for students. The system produces highly skilled, ready-to-work new employees for Swiss businesses, serving as a real and important economic incentive for business to participate³⁶”. The VET system in Australia consults with industry, however a reformed model could address the current concern that the VET system can be slow to respond to industry need and changes.

Newly introduced Tech Schools in Victoria are already playing a bridging role by providing students with immersive experiences, particularly in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths), and involving local businesses and industry in the design of courses³⁷.

There could be a bigger role for Tech Schools in Victoria in supporting the training and applied learning components of a reformed vocational and applied learning system and adopting components from Germany or Switzerland’s dual-track system. This model could be supported by Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) who have long-standing diverse and deep relationships in their communities, to provide the independent brokerage role between schools, local businesses and industry.

It will be important that a reformed dual track model maintains a strong focus on providing young people with meaningful opportunities and not risk locking them in to specific pathways early in their schooling. The focus must not be on churning out workers to meet industry need.

³⁶ National Center on Education and the Economy, Gold Standard: The Swiss Vocational Education and Training System, <<http://ncee.org/swiss-vet/>>, accessed 6 April 2020.

³⁷ Premier of Victoria, *The Schools: Delivering The Future Of Education For Victorian Students*, Media Release, 26 April 2016, <<https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/tech-schools-delivering-the-future-of-education-for-victorian-students/>>, accessed 6 April 2020.

Clear and aspirational career pathways

VCOSS members report young people and their families do not know or understand the range of career pathways, jobs and industries available to them.

VCOSS members also raise concerns that some young people feel locked into a career pathway or trajectory when undertaking specific VETiS or SBATS as part of VCAL.

There is a pressing need for clear and comprehensive information about different opportunities and career pathways in VCAL to assist young people, their families and the community to understand the full benefits this qualification can provide. School career practitioners also need to be skilled and equipped with this knowledge and information.

The Victorian Skills Gateway addresses some of these gaps, but does not appear to be widely known and could be better utilised. The website contains a number of inaccuracies regarding what courses are required or recommended for particular occupations, and inaccuracies in salary expectations for these occupations. Some courses do not clearly indicate occupation or career opportunities, while others do not capture some of the more aspirational career pathways that a course or career can offer.

It is important that career progression pathways are provided so that young people can be both aspirational about their futures, and also make informed decisions that align with their strengths and interests.

An accurate and up-to-date website would make it easier for school career practitioners to better advise and support students.

Career practitioners in schools should also be appropriately skilled and knowledgeable to provide information and advice. The Victorian Government has made welcome changes to upskills career practitioners³⁸, however, VCOSS members report schools need more capacity through additional career practitioner positions to provide young people with meaningful and accurate information. This is particularly important for young people experiencing disadvantage who may need additional support, or who do not have family networks who can help understand and navigate post-secondary school pathways.

³⁸ Department of Education and Training, Transforming career education, <<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/transforming-career.aspx>>, accessed 31 March 2020.

Schools and career practitioners also need to actively promote VCAL itself, as well as the opportunities it provides. VCOSS members report some young people leave secondary school without knowing the certificate existed and were not given the opportunity to explore whether or not was a viable option that aligned with their interests and strengths.

Having a platform that provided a range of people in varying industries to showcase what VCAL helped them achieve could build the aspiration and reputation of the certificate. This could include high-profile Australians who undertook a vocational and applied learning pathway and have set-up very successful businesses and career opportunities.

Making clear the links between vocational and applied learning and employment opportunities is particularly important for young people with disabilities to help them make informed decisions about their post-school pathways. Young people with disability need tailored advice and career practitioners, teachers and school communities with high aspirations for them.

VCOSS members reflected there was not enough opportunity for people who have completed VCAL to showcase what this pathway enabled them to achieve.

Delivery

Provide equitable access for all students to high-quality, relevant courses

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Fully fund vocational and applied learning in school and community settings
- Enable all students to equitably access VETiS, SWL and workplace learning experiences by ensuring schools have funding to address transport disadvantage for their student cohort
- Offer blended learning for rural and regional students and ensure teachers are appropriately trained to deliver this model
- Provide tailored support for students with disability to undertake vocational and applied learning, including reasonable adjustments and career advice
- Provide tailored and individualised support for young people in the juvenile justice system
- Use government funding to enable VET providers to develop and deliver courses that meet industry needs in rural and regional areas, including delivery of courses for VETiS and SBAT students

Adequately fund vocational and applied learning

Funding is a significant area of concern in the delivery of vocational and applied learning. Vocational and applied learning needs to be fully funded in mainstream and independent schools, and eligible community providers to ensure equitable access for all students who want to undertake it.

In particular:

- VCAL programs in general are underfunded, as compared to VCE. This issue is further compounded as the learning experiences for many students who access VCAL would be improved in smaller classes with more individualised learning.

The nature of applied learning means that it should be flexible and adaptable. Adequate funding is needed to ensure vocational and applied learning can respond to the individual needs of students at a consistently high quality. This should include resources to accommodate smaller class sizes so teachers have the time to appropriately adapt the curriculum to the interests and abilities of each individual student.

- VETiS programs often incur additional costs to the students, which can create unreasonable and avoidable barriers to participation. These costs are often several hundred dollars per student.

For families who are on low incomes, this acts as a significant and prohibitive barrier for some students who cannot afford to pay, meaning they miss out on studying their preferred course that attracts extra fees, or the opportunity to study vocational and applied learning at all.

VETiS courses in rural and regional areas may also cost more to run and may require additional funding to meet these costs.

- Travel costs to undertake VETiS, if not done at the school campus, often become the responsibility of the student. This can be a particular constraint for young people in rural and regional areas who may need to travel extensively to attend their chosen course.

Schools should have sufficient funding to ensure students and families do not face out of pocket costs to attend VETiS, SWL or other workplace opportunities by having to pay for public transport or other travel options where public transport is not available.

Access for rural and regional communities

Not all VCAL, VETiS and SBAT students in rural and regional areas have access to relevant and high-quality applied learning, particularly when choosing VET courses.

Blended learning should be developed and offered in these areas to help remove some of the barriers that currently exist in accessing high-quality options. In the broader VET context, government should incentivise VET providers to develop and deliver courses that meet industry need in rural and regional areas to provide career exposure and pathway opportunities, including those courses offered through VETiS and SBATs.

Blended learning can include online components, as well as workplace learning, excursions or immersion experiences, and zoom learning (for example, a webinar). This model should be accompanied by access to appropriate supports so students can get the help they need when they need it.

Teachers need to be appropriately trained to deliver a blended learning model so it is efficient, effective and meaningful for students. Effective blended learning costs the same as face to face learning and should be funded to reflect this.

A variety of VET courses should be widely available to ensure young people have access to courses that reflect their interests and aspirations, and should not be offered only on the basis of workforce growth. However, there is a need for courses in rural and regional areas to have some connection to future career opportunities so that young people who have a desire to do so, can access career pathways that enable them to remain in their communities. VCOSS members report available VET courses in rural and regional areas don't always reflect job opportunities in the region. This makes it difficult for young people to understand and explore future career opportunities that may enable them to gain meaningful employment in their local community post-school.

There are two ways this issue could be addressed. The first considers VCAL, VETiS and SBATs within the broader VET context, and recommends a move away from demand-driven funding in the VET system. RTOs need to allocate significant funding to meet compliance requirements which contributes to a move towards offering courses with large take-up to bring in money. This means that courses that may be extremely valuable in a particular region but are likely to have take-up too small to cover larger compliance costs are unlikely to be developed and offered. Moving to a new funding model would better enable providers to offer some courses that match industry need in rural and regional areas, and this would have a flow on effect of what courses are on offer for secondary school students

A second way of addressing the mismatch between courses offered and industry need is for government to use a funding mechanism to incentivise providers to offer identified courses. The costs of developing a course and finding or training skilled teachers to deliver it can be significant, including courses offered to VCAL, VETiS and SBAT students. Government can provide funding through a tender process to incentivise providers in rural and regional areas

to develop and run courses that may have small up-take but that service an industry need in rural and regional areas. This will enable students undertaking VCAL, VETiS and SBATs an opportunity for broader industry exposure, access to courses that link to job opportunities, and the chance to begin learning the skills they need to get a job in their local community.

Access for students with disabilities

Students with disability should have specific and tailored responses to support their access to vocational and applied learning at school. People with disability continue to have much lower employment rates than people without disability, and Year 12 attainment or equivalent is still low relative to other student cohorts³⁹.

VCAL, VETiS and SBATs should be options for students with disability if it aligns with their interests and strengths. However, VCROSS members report some students with disability are 'filtered' or pressured into VCAL without real choice or support to build on their strengths, aspirations and interest, to help decide which pathway is most suitable for them.

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) found that less than one-fifth of students were supported in understanding their strengths and skills for post-school transition⁴⁰. Students with disability need tailored support that starts early in their education to foster aspiration for their future. This is especially important in light of ongoing anecdotal evidence of 'gatekeeping' where children with disability are refused entry or enrolment into a school, or are restricted in attending school full-time⁴¹. As a starting point this places large number of students with disabilities without access to education and impedes many young people's ability to make it to senior secondary schooling.

Some students with disability require reasonable adjustment to equally participate in education. These considerations need to be equally applied to vocational and applied learning including in assessments and outcomes. Relevant course material and information about vocational and applied learning needs to be in accessible formats, including Easy English. Additionally, students with disability need tailored support to ensure they can meaningfully participate in SWL or other industry exposure or work-based experiences. These measures need to be accompanied by tailored supports to meet individual student's needs.

³⁹ ABS, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings*, Cat No 4430.0, October 2019.

⁴⁰ Children and Young People with Disability Australia, *The Review of Senior Secondary Pathways Into Work, Further Education and Training: Submission to the Education Council*, 2019.

⁴¹ *ibid*

A concerted effort needs to be made to ensure all education settings – mainstream and specialist – are appropriately and adequately supporting students with disability into aspirational post-school pathways, including supporting students to explore and undertake their interests in VCAL, VETiS and SBATs.

Provide people in youth justice centres with meaningful education

VCOSS members report young people in youth justice centres are not receiving the full benefits of a meaningful education while on remand or completing a sentence.

Many young people in youth justice centres have experienced high rates of abuse and trauma, and there are high rates of intellectual disability in the youth justice cohort⁴². Education is particularly important for this cohort of young people and can support future opportunities of meaningful employment and social connection.

These young people often need tailored responses to support their learning needs. This should include environments that reflect similar learning needs and support to ascertain the level and abilities of each young person so they get the support they need to learn. VCOSS members report VCAL is often constrained in these environments by security or resourcing decisions. While these are important considerations, young people in youth justice centres, including those on remand, need to feel safe and appropriately supported to engage in education.

Case Study:

VCOSS member Jesuit Social Services works with young people in Parkville and Malmsbury Youth Justice Centres. Their experience is that VCAL delivered in Parkville College is a valuable learning option for some young people while in detention. However, they note that young people would benefit from more individual support, such as one-on-one tutoring. In a group environment, where young people are at different levels of need and ability, Jesuit Social Services notes that many young people are unlikely to reveal their learning challenges and may disengage from class.

⁴² J White, K Te Riele, T Corcoran, A Baker, P Moylan R Abdul Manan, *Improving educational connection for young people in custody*, Final Report, Victoria University, University of Tasmania, Deakin University, June 2019.

VCOSS members also report young people in justice centres need access to more hands-on applied learning opportunities to improve their skills and opportunities for when they exit the system. There is also a need for more 'joining up' of the education young people received and obtained while in a youth justice centre, and the opportunities and pathways available to them once they re-enter the community.

Support a high-quality workforce

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Include applied learning as a proficiency in teaching degrees
- Schools should provide adequate opportunities for teachers to ensure their industry skills and knowledge are up to date
- Provide teachers with access to training and information to meet the needs of students

Teachers need the right information, training and resources to deliver high-quality teaching, support students and to improve the quality of vocational and applied learning.

Teacher qualifications should include compulsory best-practice training on applied learning, and view applied learning as a proficiency, rather than a skill acquired only by undertaking an elective, specialisation, or through professional development. VCOSS members report some teachers complete their university degrees without knowing VCAL exists, and have to retrofit their skills to suit applied learning. The lack of visibility of these skills and curriculum within teaching qualifications contributes to the notion that VCAL is a second-rate option.

In addition, VCOSS members report not all teachers who deliver VETiS have appropriate training in the subject they teach. Some teachers have only completed a short professional development course in the subject they deliver, compared to others with extensive industry experience. This can impact the quality of the education young people receive. For example, concerns were raised that a teacher undertaking a two-hour professional development in a particular subject compared to a teacher who has significant industry experience, is likely to yield different levels of quality for any given course. VCOSS acknowledges this is a complex area of policy and notes more compliance requirements are unlikely to have intended positive outcomes.

Teachers are well placed to identify young people who are at-risk of school disengagement, but not all teachers have the necessary training or skills to identify the young people who may need additional support. Teachers, including teachers who deliver VETiS, should have access to resources and training to help them identify the needs of students who may be struggling or at-risk. Teachers should also have access to appropriate training, information, resources and supports to help them meet the needs of particular cohorts of young people (for example, trauma informed practice).

Outcomes

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prioritise and capture outcomes that assist students to achieve complex skills and life skills

Successful educational outcomes for students need to be reconceptualised to capture the skills required to succeed in the workplace. While literacy and numeracy are fundamental skills, VCOSS members report there is growing concern from industry that young people are not leaving school with the practical knowledge and skills they need, such as interpersonal skills and how to behave in a working environment.

The skills young people need to be successful into the future are difficult to quantify and hard to assess but include “complex skills” such as adaptability, creativity and problem solving.

VCAL needs more comprehensive data capturing to reflect the wide range of outcomes that could be considered successful. As well as practical workplace skills, success might look like retention over the year or involvement in mentoring or with employers.

Data should also capture “distance travelled”⁴³. Students begin their senior secondary schooling at different starting points. Some students may be re-engaging with education after a significant period of absence, while some students may still hold precarious links with education after facing complex barriers to engagement such as experiences of family violence, alcohol and drug related issues, mental ill health, and frequently changing placements in out-of-home care.

The concept of “distance travelled” enables outcomes to take into consideration factors that make a significant difference for individual young people, such as continued engagement in education where this has previously been an issue, or improved resilience, building of trust and transferrable “complex skills” needed for the future.

⁴³ K Te Riele, M Davies & A Baker, *Passport to a Positive Future: Evaluation of the Melbourne Academy*, The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning, 2015.

Empowering students to reflect on the outcomes they have achieved through vocational and applied learning is one way to capture this data.

For example, in the Brotherhood of St Laurence's 2014 evaluation of its Community VCAL program, students were interviewed and provided an opportunity to express how far they felt they had come throughout the year in those harder to assess outcomes such as confidence, motivation, engagement and resilience⁴⁴. This could be a valuable way to gain insights into the successes of vocational and applied learning, while providing students with an opportunity for self-reflection and personal growth.

⁴⁴ G Myconos, *Lessons from a flexible learning program the Brotherhood of St Laurence Community VCAL education program for young people 2010-2013*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2014.



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