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# VCOSS submission to the SkillsIQ Draft Community Services Training Package

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The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak body for social and community services in Victoria. VCOSS supports the community services industry, represents the interests of Victorians facing disadvantage and vulnerability in policy debates, and advocates to develop a sustainable, fair and equitable society.

VCOSS welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the SkillsIQ draft Community Services Training Package. This submission will focus on the Certificate IV in Community Services and Diploma of Community Services.

As a result of the limited time for consultation, VCOSS's member engagement was constrained. VCOSS would encourage SkillsIQ to allow time for more extensive consultation in future, given the strategic importance of such reviews.

## Diversity of the community sector

Victoria's community services industry is strong, vibrant and mature with a proud history of supporting people facing poverty

and disadvantage. Comprised of thousands of organisations spread throughout the state, the industry is diverse, resilient and adaptable.<sup>i</sup>

However, it is an industry under pressure:

- Pre-COVID, the community sector was under pressure to substantially grow its workforce, at pace, in response to welcome Commonwealth and State reforms in family violence, disability, aged care and mental health sectors. Concurrently, community service organisations have been struggling with increasing costs and inadequate funding and revenue.<sup>ii</sup>
- This strain has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Anecdotally, workforce shortages are being exacerbated by employee burnout. Social distancing and other COVID containment measures have also presented new challenges for community service organisations to host student placements (noting that pre-COVID, small and mid-size employers particularly struggled to

support student placements due to the resource requirements, for example, having staff available to provide student supervision).

In this context, there is enormous pressure to ensure that the qualifications that support entry into the sector are:

- Robust;
- Provide sufficient foundational knowledge across core aspects of the diverse community sector so that the qualifications encourage student up-take and completion, **and** respond to the sector's needs; and
- Enables students sufficient exposure to a range of workforce areas so they can pursue careers that align with their interests and skills.

## Certificate IV in Community Services

Across Australia, there is increased community awareness of family and domestic violence. This is contributing to increased demand for specialist family violence support, and for non-specialist organisations to play their part in identifying and responding to family violence. While Victoria is moving to minimum qualifications for family violence practitioners to hold a Bachelor of Social Work or equivalent, this is not the case, at present, for every Australian jurisdiction and, further, as noted earlier, it is important that family violence

knowledge be embedded across the broader community services system and, therefore, across a range of community services qualifications provided in the vocational and education training system.

The unit 'CHCDFV001 Recognise and respond appropriately to domestic and family violence' should be included as a core subject, rather than an elective for the Certificate IV in Community Services. This would ensure all graduating students can identify and appropriately refer both perpetrators and victim/survivors to specialised services.

While there are additional electives to provide domestic and family violence support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people from non-English speaking background communities respectively, any foundational course providing students with skills to recognise and respond to domestic and family violence should have an intersectional approach.

People hold multiple, intersecting identities and this should be a core component of this unit to ensure it addresses elements of cultural competency when supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, those with disability, and people who may be experiencing mental ill health.

In addition, while not all students and graduates will gain placement or employment in disability specific services, it

is vital that all graduates understand how to support the rights, interests and needs of people with disability and their support networks.

Just under 20 per cent of Australians have a disability<sup>iii</sup>. It is important that qualifications support a workforce that is able to meet community need by providing core foundational knowledge and skills that support graduates to work effectively with people with disability in a way that promotes and upholds their rights. Employers have told VCOSS that there are gaps in the disability knowledge of new workers – as a consequence of gaps in the VET curriculum, some organisations are having to provide supplementary, non-accredited training to recent graduates.

VCOSS's written submission to the SkillsIQ VET Disability Education Delivery discussion paper provides additional information and recommendations.<sup>iv</sup>

## Diploma of Community Services

The consultation paper proposes substantial changes to the Diploma of Community Services that VCOSS does not believe reflects the diversity of the sector and the capacity and needs of community service organisations.

### Units of competency

VCOSS is concerned about the increase in the number of units required to complete the Diploma from 16 to 20. The increase in units may place an unreasonable burden on

students that may impact enrolment, retention and completion rates.

Additional units may make it difficult for students to undertake the qualification:

- The increase in units will likely require VET providers to increase the duration of the course, increasing the financial and time cost for students.
- Conversely, some VET providers may try to deliver an increased number of units over the same period to minimise their own (ie. provider) costs but leaving students with insufficient time to reflect, learn and embed the content, while carrying the financial burden of paying for additional units.

Ideally the Diploma of Community Services should comprise 16 units, although VCOSS concedes that there may be a case for 18. However, VCOSS does not support 20 units.

To ensure students are able to undertake the specialisation streams, there should be a minimum of six electives. Electives are also an important component of enabling providers to tailor courses to reflect local industry and community need, which is particularly important in urban fringe and regional areas.

### Case management and counselling

VCOSS members expressed concern about the emphasis on counselling and case

management in the proposed changed to the Diploma of Community Services. This is because many students and graduates will not go on to work in case management or counselling roles.

The Diploma is a generalist qualification that provides a broad base of foundational knowledge.

To this end, we recommend maintaining 'CHCCSL001 Establish and confirm the counselling relationship' and 'CHCCSM005 Develop, facilitate and review all aspects of case management', and removing the three additional counselling and case management units from core to elective, to ensure the Diploma remains a generalist qualification that can meet the needs of the sector more broadly.

#### Foundational knowledge

The Diploma of Community Services should provide students with the fundamentals to work across a broad range of areas and in a broad range of organisations. This will require the qualification to address key areas that are currently missing including family violence and disability. VCROSS members spoke about knowledge gaps in students and graduates for these areas.

As discussed above in feedback for the Certificate IV in Community Services, the Diploma level qualification should include a core foundational unit that addresses family and domestic violence through an intersectional lens. We recommend the same unit suggested for the Certificate IV in

Community Services, 'CHCDFV001', be introduced as a core unit for the Diploma.

We also recommend the inclusion of a core unit that gives students an understanding of disability, including a human rights and person-centred approach, as discussed under feedback for the Certificate IV in Community Services.

#### Student work placement hours

The value of on-the-job training is significant. It can be an effective 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 workplace.<sup>v</sup> Work placement also provides valuable networking opportunities that supports students to gain employment after graduation, often through their placement organisations.

VCROSS recognises that courses with a higher number of work placement hours provides better outcomes for students and the sector. VCROSS supports additional work placement hours to a **minimum** of 200 hours, acknowledging some members have expressed the value of 400 hours of placement, however, we do not support proposed changes that tie increased hours to case management units.

Members raised concerns that they would be unable to provide the number of case management hours required under proposed changes for student placements. For example, one large community service organisation said they would, at most, be

able to provide 50 hours of case management for a student placement. This means the proposed placement reforms could be disruptive for student learning and limiting for organisations to offer student placements, raising questions about whether organisations would deem the investment in taking on a student to be worth their while.

If additional placement hours are being considered, these could be redistributed to other core units such as 'CHCDEV002 Analyse impacts of sociological factors on clients in community work and services' and/or 'CHCPRP003 Reflect on and improve own professional practice'.

**“Any amount of unpaid placement is difficult for a student but it’s critical... At the end of the day [more placement hours] creates better practitioners and that creates safety for clients, colleagues and themselves” – VCOSS member**

While this may be beyond the scope of the review, to support the viability of the community services industry and improve access to high-quality student placements, community organisations need to be funded for this work.

Models such as the Victorian Enhanced Pathways to Family Violence Work Project provide clear examples of how

organisations in priority industries can be assisted to support the workforce to expand, recognising that while placements provide significant organisational value (particularly as a pipeline for new workers), there are significant costs associated with hosting placements that are hard for many community service organisations to absorb.

Consideration should also be given to holistic traineeship models to provide students with vital on-the-job training while removing financial barriers to learners through the provision of a wage and boosting support to increase retention and completion.

For example, the Community Traineeship Pilot Program (CTPP) delivered by VCOSS supports young people experiencing barriers to labour market participation to undertake a Certificate IV in Community Services, while supporting community service organisations to host traineeships and meet their future workforce needs.

The wrap around model of this program offers a comprehensive, learner-focused structure of support, designed to foster collaboration between a range of key stakeholders to ensure learners don't fall through the cracks. The CTPP has seen positive outcomes, including a retention rate of 80 per cent for the first group of participants, with more than 50 per cent gaining further employment with their employer upon completion of their traineeship.

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A fully accessible version is available online at [vcoss.org.au/policy](https://vcoss.org.au/policy).

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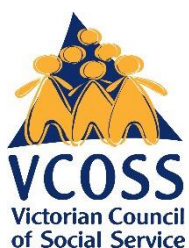
<sup>i</sup> VCOSS, *10 Year Community Services industry Plan*, August 2018.

<sup>ii</sup> Future Social Service Institute with VCOSS, *Stories into evidence: COVID-19 adaptations in the Victorian community services sector*, 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *People with disability in Australia*, 2 October 2020, accessed 9 June 2021, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/people-with-disability/prevalence-of-disability>>.

<sup>iv</sup> VCOSS, *VET Disability Education Delivery. VCOSS feedback on the SkillsIQ discussion paper 'VET Disability Education Delivery'*, October 2020.

<sup>v</sup> Deloitte Insights, 'The path to prosperity. Why the future of work is human', *Building the Lucky Country* #7, 2019.



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