

## About this Communique

The Department of Education and Training (DET) – Community Sector Organisation (CSO) Governance Group is a quarterly forum for communication, consultation, engagement and collaboration between the department and the community sector. Meetings are co-chaired by the department and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and reflect topics of mutual interest to DET and the sector. You can read more about the partnership agreement that underpins this work on the [VCOSS](#) and [department](#) websites.

This Communique has been prepared by VCOSS to increase the visibility of this forum.

## What was discussed in the June 2022 meeting?

The focus of this meeting was engagement/reengagement.

### Senior secondary reforms

**Kelly Jarvis, Director, Senior Secondary Certificate Reforms, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority** provided an update on the senior secondary reforms. Two new integrated certificates, the VCE Vocational Major and Victorian Pathways Certificate, will replace the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and have been designed to better meet the needs of students in a rapidly changing economy. Flexibility has been built into the certificates to meet the needs of individual students and includes a range of options including apprenticeships and traineeships. Recent funding announced in the 2022-23 Victorian Budget will support students to access a core offering of twelve priority VET pathways and will invest in a statewide expansion of the Head Start program.

### Adult and community education

**Eduard De Hue, Senior Manager, Participation, Inclusion and Regional Engagement Branch, Higher Education and Skills, DET** provided an update on the Adult Community Further Education (ACFE) Board's current priorities. Key areas of focus include increasing representation of Koorie learners in adult community education and looking at ways to meet the needs of adults in the workforce who have foundational skills needs such as digital skills, literacy, and numeracy.

### Australian Early Development Census

**Cathie Nolan, Manager, Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), DET** spoke about the AEDC and the Victorian results. The AEDC collects national data on five key domains of early childhood development during the first year of school. The census is collected every three years and the most recent data is from 2021. Despite significant periods of stay-at-home measures and disruption due to COVID-19, the Victorian data shows there was minimal change in vulnerability in Victoria, and lower vulnerability in Victoria than in the rest of the country. While vulnerability remained stable across all five domains with 20 per cent of children in Victoria classified as developmentally vulnerable in 2021, there were changes in local areas. The AEDC in Victoria is looking to expand the current scope, to begin data collection earlier in life and continue later in life, to support longitudinal data collection.

**Megan O’Connell, Director, Advocacy and Member Solutions, Early Learning Association Australia** used AEDC data maps to highlight that vulnerability exists everywhere in every community. Megan noted that while the data shows some communities and children are more vulnerable based on risk factors, there are still pockets of vulnerability in affluent areas. COVID-19 has magnified risk factors for children and families which is likely to be felt for many years, with observable impacts on children’s development. There is concern for children and families who are not enrolled in or not attending services – these children and families are less visible or not visible at all. This impedes our understanding of the level and type of need in the community and makes them harder to reach in terms of early intervention support. There is an opportunity to pursue a more systemic approach to vulnerability, using kindergarten as a universal platform.

## Supporting school engagement/reengagement

**Laura Brennan, Director, and Felicity Jackson, Senior Policy Officer, Engaging Students at Risk, Wellbeing, Health, and Engagement Division, DET** provided an update on the recent Victorian Auditor-General’s Office (VAGO) report on Navigator and the 2022-23 Victorian State Budget funding for the program. The VAGO report concluded that the department should invest in better data capture to understand the outcomes being achieved through Navigator and ensure all students have reasonable access to the program. The report did not raise concerns about the program model or way it is delivered. The department has changed the data system to accurately track young people who enter Navigator, including the support they receive, the progress they make and pathways out of the program. Laura and Felicity noted the recent funding allocated to pilot a new program for 10- to 11-year-old students and the investment for new staffing positions in the department’s regional offices to support a more coherent, system-wide approach to supporting disengagement.

**Phil Wheatley, Executive Officer, Operation Newstart Victoria, Brendon Delaney, Program Manager, Operation Newstart Northern, Josh Baker, Assistant Principal, Oberon High School, Chair of Operation Newstart Geelong and a Graduate student** spoke about the impact of Operation Newstart in preventing students disengaging from education. Key enablers for the program’s success include taking a partnership approach; working in small groups with a multi-skilled intervention approach that focuses on the young person, their family, school, and community; utilising teachers who work alongside youth workers or social workers and using a strengths-based approach. Operation Newstart offers unique wilderness therapy that builds the skills and capacity of the young people, while promoting fun. The program embeds FISO 2.0 and activities that are mapped back to the Victorian Curriculum, however, due to the reliance on grants for funding, the program faces constraints and uncertainty for young people. The graduate student spoke about experiences of insecurity and uncertainty that led to them disengaging from school. Operation Newstart helped the graduate student develop a sense of self-belief and confidence and supported their reengagement in education.

## Next meeting

The theme of the Term 3 meeting will be mental health and wellbeing. Please contact VCOSS if there is something you would like to share with us, to guide our planning for future meetings.

Another significant event is the VCOSS 2022 Community Sector Education Forum. The event will focus on the theme of ‘Wellbeing’ and be held virtually on 8 September 2022.

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