

**ENHANCING THE RETENTION OF  
YOUNG PEOPLE  
ESPECIALLY TO  
YEAR 12  
THROUGH VOCATIONAL SKILLS**



Australian Government  
Department of Education, Employment  
and Workplace Relations







**FINAL REPORT**

**Enhancing the retention of young people to Year 12,  
especially through vocational skills**

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## PREFACE

This report *‘Enhancing the retention of young people to Year 12, especially through vocational skills’* is an outcome of a very productive two year collaboration between the Australian College of Educators (ACE), TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations ( DEEWR), and later also with a research team from Work-based Education Research Centre (WERC) at Victoria University.

ACE was very keen to get involved in this work and co-funded the project with DEEWR, because we understood that VET in schools is an essential part of the structures that will need to work well for all students if Australia is to meet the targets it has set itself under the Youth Compact, Closing the Gap of Indigenous Disadvantage, and for its equity agenda for higher education.

The outcomes of this project are important because they have clear implications for current programs and strategies, policies, funding arrangements and data collection and use.

Far too many students who enroll in a VET in school subject do not complete year 12, or its equivalent. In fact many students finish 12 years of schooling without any evidence of having benefitted from their years at school. It is the most disadvantaged and least engaged students who over participate in the lowest level courses and fail to complete courses/ units that open up pathways to further learning or work/ learning opportunities in disproportionate numbers.

This report makes it clear that it doesn’t have to be that way. Where additional support structures and tailored strategies are implemented in a holistic way, course/unit completions and successful transitions to further learning or work/learning placements improve. However the programs profiled in this report are exceptions rather than the rule and are dependent on additional non-ongoing funding sources and highly committed individuals. Simply encouraging other institutions to implement like approaches will never grow these approaches to scale and in a way that is sustainable. It is clear that Australia now needs to move beyond the funding of more research about what works, more pilots and more one off projects. Policy responses that provide, for students who are not currently benefitting from school, supports and strategies that are part of core servicing on a sustainable basis are essential.

Finally it is worth noting that the findings of this project point to lessons for the setting of targets and the collection and use of data. Current agreed national targets and data used to track progress in youth retention and VET participation does not allow us to track the levels of units undertaken, the relative completion rate and the post unit/course pathways by Indigenous and other disadvantaged groups. This issue has been highlighted by the COAG Reform Council Reports and we join with them in advocating for a timely response to this issue.

**Australian College of Educators**

TAFE Directors Australia is delighted to promote the Final Report of *‘Enhancing the retention of young people to Year 12, especially through vocational skills’*.

The report, prepared by the Work-based Education Research Centre (WERC) at Victoria University is the result of a two-year joint collaboration between the Australian College of Educators (ACE) and TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) which began in 2008 under the then Minister for Education Julia Gillard MP. At

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that time, DEEWR sponsored a National Forum on Vocational Skills for Youth, held in Hobart, in April that year.

An Occasional Paper which was published as a result of the 2008 Hobart Forum ([www.tda.edu.au](http://www.tda.edu.au)) identified some key recommendations for governments, including that further research be undertaken to review vocational college and alternate school pathway models in Australia.

This project, using as a framework the *Key Success Factors for Upper Secondary Skilling* developed by the 2008 Hobart National Forum, examined nine innovative best practice case studies of vocational colleges within TAFE institutes and alternative pathways in secondary schools from a number of Australian states and concluded that those programs that were successful in retaining the highest need cohort of students invariably deployed a whole of organisation approach.

Across several states and territories, approximately 41% of students in Years 11 and 12 enroll in a 'VET in schools' subjects. Vocational programs for young people have been identified as having both economic and social benefits. In the first instance they open up opportunities for employment. This smoothing of transition to full-time work is confirmed in the recent Foundation for Young Australian reports (Lamb & Mason 2008; Robinson & Lamb 2009).

Australia has set ambitious targets for year 12 retention or its equivalent and this is laudable, but in achieving this goal it is critical that we also ensure that young people who undertake vocational programs in TAFE institutes or schools, prior to the end of year 12, gain real benefit by being well prepared and encouraged to take up work and/or further learning opportunities.

**TAFE Directors Australia**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Retention to Year 12 and successful transition to work or further study have become a priority for all Australian Governments as is evidenced by the significant commitment being made by the Commonwealth and States and Territories through the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions. It is recognised that completion of Year 12 or an equivalent vocational qualification provides the sound foundation required to undertake further study or transition into employment. In late 2008, the Australian College of Educators (ACE) commissioned the Work-based Education Research Centre at Victoria University to undertake a research project entitled *Enhancing retention of young people to year 12, especially through vocational skills*.

The broad aim of the project was to examine the factors that contribute to the retention, completion and transition of 15 to 19 year olds, especially through vocational education and training programs, and within different educational contexts.

In particular the research team was asked to provide a research report which:

- developed case studies of a variety of innovative vocational programs designed to retain young people in study and provide them with pathways to further study or employment. These case studies were to be drawn from different states and territories and would be designed to examine features of these organisations/programs that are successful and can be replicated
- analysed the key success factors for each case study, and
- benchmarked them against the Key Success Factors for Upper Secondary Skilling identified by TAFE Directors Australia and the Australian College of Educators in the publication of the outcomes of a national forum held in Hobart in 2008

As the focus of the study was to explore vocational programs within six to ten different contexts, a case study method was employed which allowed the investigation of both the various phenomena and the contextual conditions in which they were occurring (Yin, 1994). The research was framed by an extensive review of the literature on early school leaving, strategies for engaging and re-engaging young learners, completion and transition into further education or work. In addition a draft evaluative framework was developed as a guide for data collection and analysis. Nine organizations agreed to participate in the study. These organisations were representative of the types of educational institutions delivering vocational programs for young people – individual schools, TAFE institutes in collaboration with schools, and vocational colleges and trade schools located within TAFEs. The vocational programs examined were also representative of those being offered more broadly across the sectors. They included enabling programs with an element of vocational study; VET in Schools courses; blends of senior secondary certificates with vocational qualifications; specific school-based programs such as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and school-based traineeships.

A total of nine case studies were developed, shaped by the evaluative framework and populated by information gathered through comprehensive focus group interviews and an examination of organisational and course documents provided by the participating educational institutions.

This study suggests that in implementing vocational programs consideration needs to be given to the following:

The context in which programs are to be offered and the specific needs of different cohorts of young people should be the determinants for how vocational skills are developed. As is evidenced in the case studies, across Australian States and Territories a range of vocational programs has emerged to address the needs of particular student cohorts. Programs are offered that concentrate on providing previously disengaged students with attractive learning options designed to encourage them to persist with education and training. Programs

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are also offered in a way that allows students to gain dual qualifications and open up pathways to further education or work. Within each of these programs, further acknowledgement of diversity occurs as the needs of individual students are met through carefully tailored and personalized learning experiences. This diversity is important and should be maintained. There is considerable potential in all of these programs to facilitate retention. Therefore no one program structure or funding approach should be universally applied.

Effective vocational programs in this study exhibit many of the key factors identified in the evaluative framework. They involve the provision of quality information to students and other stakeholders; they identify specific students needs and the teaching approaches adopted place emphasis upon the individual negotiating learning in a flexible and tailored way. The curriculum is designed to be relevant and practical - developing vocational and foundation skills in an integrated manner.

Successful programs adopt a coordinated whole-of-organisation approach to supporting students, and formal and informal strategies draw on professionals such as counsellors and youth workers and all staff to actively engage in building strong student - teacher relationships. Students are also encouraged to maintain close relationships with each other and peer mentoring strategies are actively developed supported.

Facilitating effective transition requires the negotiation of structured pathways with key stakeholders. For this reason, outcomes for students in vocational programs are substantially enhanced by the development of collaborative activities and close working relationships with other training providers, schools, community agencies and importantly, employers and industry.

When well delivered and supported vocational programs allow young people to gain nationally-recognised qualifications, provide work-related experience, career advice and a level of work readiness that stands them in good stead to take up opportunities to move into further study or work on completion of their program. Moreover, these programs provide individuals with the opportunity to imagine a future that they may not have previously envisioned.

Impediments to the success of vocational programs identified through the research included the perceptions held by some students, careers counsellors, teachers and parents about the status and value of VET especially when the logistics required to coordinate timetables, work experience, work placements and formal study in the busy lives of students were often difficult to manage. Further hindrances related to the costs associated with supporting students with high needs and the disparate funding models that are applied in schools and TAFEs for the various programs. Finally, the lack of a standardised approach to data collection for vocational programs for young people, a reluctance or inability to share data between organisation or the capacity to track students from one system to another were also seen to get in the way of determining the true extent of student success.

The evaluative framework containing the key success factors and strategies formulated for this study proved to be an effective mechanism for assessing critical program characteristics. The framework can be utilised to guide the development of new vocational programs or evaluate existing ones. It could also shape the monitoring and reporting of outcomes from projects and programs in this arena in which government funding has been invested.

Many of the factors listed in the evaluative framework manifested themselves in an interrelated way in the programs described in the case studies. Some could not be separated out as individual entities or identified as single factors. They were frequently embedded in programs in holistic ways. For this reason, leading, supporting and connecting were often discussed as one factor. Connecting was interrelated to students but also to external relationships with parents, industry and the community. Organisational leadership permeated throughout the examples and was reflected most often in the way people carried out their tasks in the

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programs, the way they spoke about their students and the manner in which they interacted with key stakeholders.

The types of programs documented in these case studies can be replicated elsewhere and the advice and enthusiasm of the people who informed this research should encourage others to build on what they have by using the evaluative framework, coupled with ideas from these case studies as a guide. However, as many of these programs show, it takes more than a teacher and a group of students to make a program successful or to ensure high rates of retention and smooth transition to further study or work.

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## INTRODUCTION

In late 2009, the Australian College of Educators (ACE) commissioned the Work-based Education Research Centre at Victoria University to undertake a research project entitled *Enhancing retention of young people to year 12, especially through vocational skills*. Earlier in 2009, the Commonwealth and states and territories had entered into the National partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions, the goal of which is 'to increase the educational engagement and attainment of young people and to improve their transitions to post school education, training and employment through immediate, concerted action supported by broader long term reform'.

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Pages/NationalPartnership.aspx>

In this context, the research team was asked to examine a range of approaches taken by schools and TAFE institutes to provide vocational skills for young people aged between 15 and 19 years of age. The project, funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, involved the production of a report focusing on the achievements in the provision of vocational programs for young people by a purposeful sample of secondary schools, operating independently and /or in partnership with TAFE institutes and vocational colleges, based in TAFE institutes.

In particular the research team was asked to provide a research report that:

- developed case studies of a variety of innovative programs that have successfully retained young people in study and provided them with pathways to further study or employment. These case studies were to be drawn from different states and territories and would be designed to examine features of organisations and programs that are successful and can be replicated;
- analysed the key success factors for each case study, and
- benchmarked them against the Key Success Factors for Upper Secondary Skilling identified by TAFE Directors Australia and the Australian College of Educators in the publication of the outcomes of a national forum held in Hobart in 2008.

The outcomes of the project were to include:

- advice to inform both policy and practice, and to support the development of more effective ways of engaging young people in education and skills training.
- a body of information on alternative models of engaging youth based on a national and international literature search and comparative approaches to engaging young people drawn from a number of States and Territories.
- analysis of the curriculum, pedagogy and strategies used to support, guide and retain students in schooling and/or training, as well as position vocational education as an accepted and valuable school choice and pathway into further study.
- a project methodology for evaluating models of engagement that can be replicated by other providers and authorities within schools and training organisations.
- advice to Government that would enable:
  - Government funding to be more appropriately directed towards supporting successful models for retaining young people in education and training
  - Government initiatives to support programs that incorporate key success factors
  - Government to achieve better value from their investments
  - Government to support programs that can be replicated by a range of education and training institutions.

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## RESEARCH METHOD AND PROCEDURE

The broad aim of the project was to examine the factors that contribute to the retention, completion and transition of 15 to 19 year olds especially through vocational education and training programs within different educational contexts.

The research questions shaping the study were:

1. What characteristics of vocational programs for 15 to 19 year olds in secondary schools, TAFE institutes, vocational colleges and trade schools are critical for successful retention and completion to Year 12 and transition to further education or employment?
2. What are the relationships among the characteristics and how are such relationships influenced by different educational settings, contexts and models of program delivery.
3. In what ways are these characteristics particular to educational settings, contexts and different models of program delivery?

As the focus of the study was to explore vocational programs within six to ten different contexts, a case study method was employed which allowed the investigation of both the various phenomena and the contextual conditions in which they were occurring (Yin, 1994).

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

The project was conducted in a number of phases, the first of which involved an extensive review of material on early-school leaving, student engagement and on the outcomes of programs designed specifically to prevent attrition from senior secondary studies. Research on vocational education and training was also examined, with a particular focus on completion and transition for young people. The major purpose of this review was to validate and build on a set of key success factors for upper secondary skilling developed by the 2009 TAFE Directors Australia and Australian College of Educators forum held in Hobart (TAFE Directors Australia 2008:5) and to shape the focus and collection of data in the case study phase of the study. From this initial review of the literature, a draft evaluative framework was developed that highlighted a set of characteristics determined within the literature to be critical to student success, together with a series of related strategies that underpinned each of the success factors.

The review of the literature is included at Appendix 1 and the draft evaluative framework is set out in the following section of this report.

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## ORGANISATIONAL SAMPLE

With the Project Plan, it was noted that the research was to focus upon the achievement of a sample of secondary schools, operating independently and/ or in partnership with TAFE institutes and vocational colleges, based in TAFE institutes and providing skills development programs to young people. The brief also outlined that seven educational institutions had agreed to participate in the research, although these were deemed to be indicative only.

An extensive review of the literature, particularly in relation to VET in Schools together with a scan of the VET in Schools sections of State and Territory Department of Education and Training websites coupled with specialist websites such VISTA <http://www.vista.org.au/home>; Voc Ed Learning Group and <http://www.velg.com.au/> provided details about more potential case study sites.

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The key success factors for upper secondary skilling guided the analysis of each case as did the information gathered to formulate the draft evaluative framework. Where multiple success factors were evident in the collation of material around each site they were included, if there was insufficient evidence organizations were excluded. A list of 29 possible cases were then presented to the Project Advisory Committee all of whom had been identified as having in place some form of innovative teaching practice, strategies for supporting students that reflected those in the evaluative framework; partnerships and relationships with the community and /or industry and that had highlighted curriculum and teaching innovation, flexibility in delivery and assessment and clearly delineated pathways into further study or work. In many instances, the programs had been acknowledged as good practice within the literature, had been presented as promising practice at conferences or had received awards of some description.

The original list included schools operating independently and or in partnership with TAFE institutes and vocational colleges based in TAFE institutes. They also included:

- Metropolitan and regional organisations both large and small across all states and territories
- Programs targeted at different cohorts of young people eg Indigenous, disengaged young people and selective entry
- Programs delivered in diverse ways eg. School-based traineeships, VET integrated with senior secondary certificates with ATAR eligibility; non-ATAR VET in Schools and alternative approaches such as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning

On the advice of the Project Advisory Committee this listing was reduced from 29 to 13. A number of the organizations that initially indicated that were interested in participating elected not to go ahead due to time constraints and changes in staffing. Thus the pool of organizations was reduced to 10. Chief executives from each of these organizations were invited to participate in the study and nine responded in the affirmative.

The final sample was designed to be representative of the broader sector as it included:

- a mix of schools, schools and TAFEs in partnership, vocational colleges together with a Trade School,
- organizations drawn from five states and one territory
- both metropolitan and regional institutions
- diverse programs for a range of student cohorts

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## DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY

Case studies were developed using information gathered through focus group interviews and an examination of organisational and course documents provided by the participating educational institutions. As a research method, focus group interviewing encourages participants to share their perceptions, opinions and experiences in a nonjudgmental environment, thus providing the researcher with the opportunity to gather and compare insights into complex behaviours, and to establish trends and patterns within the information provided (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Morgan, 1997). Organisational documents such as curricula and program support materials provide critical detail about policies, processes and communication strategies and are also artifacts of organisational culture (Cresswell, 2009).

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## FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Twelve focus groups were conducted across the nine educational institutions. Each was two and a half hours in duration. Single focus group sessions were undertaken in the majority of the organisations, except for three TAFE institutes where multiple sessions were undertaken to examine different programs for young people that were identified as exhibiting a range of the key success factors.

A focus group protocol and question schedule was developed to ensure that consistent data were gathered across the ten case study sites. The protocol included the focus questions and prompts so that standard approaches could be applied by different researchers at different sites. A copy of this focus group protocol and question schedule is included as Appendix 2.

The participating organisations, their locations and number of focus group discussions undertaken at each site are included in the following table.

Table 1: Participating Organisations

	Organisation	Location	No of focus groups
1	Adelaide Hills Vocational College	South Australia	1
2	Canberra Institute of Technology	ACT	2
3	Challenger TAFE	Western Australia	1
4	Copperfield College	Victoria	1
5	Holmesglen TAFE	Victoria	1
6	North Coast Institute of TAFE	New South Wales	2
7	Oakey Senior High School	Queensland	1
8	Padbury High School	Western Australia	1
9	Sydney Institute of TAFE	New South Wales	2
		Total	12

Four categories of participants were invited to participate in the focus group interviews which were conducted between March 10 and April 21, 2010. These were:

1. Program coordinators: defined as individuals responsible for the coordination of the nominated vocational program(s) (also designated as teachers in the analysis of data).
2. Teachers: individuals directly involved in the teaching of the nominated vocational program(s) including vocational education and training teachers; general education teachers; language, literacy and numeracy teachers.
3. Support staff: individuals directly involved in the provision of support for students and teachers in the nominated vocational program(s) including counsellors, youth workers, career guidance personnel and others internal to the educational institution.
4. External stakeholders: individuals external to the education institution but actively engaged in the nominated vocational program(s) including employers, partnership brokers, employment agency workers, community agencies, representatives of other training providers and industry.

A total of 100 individuals participated in focus groups. Table 2 sets out participant numbers by category and case study site.

Table 2: Focus group participants by category

	Organisation	Teachers	Support Staff	External Stakeholders	Total
1	Adelaide Hills Vocational College	3		3	6
2a	Canberra Institute of Technology: Bruce campus	2	6	4	12
2b	Canberra Institute of Technology: Southside Campus	3	6	4	13
3	Challenger TAFE	2		5	7
4	Copperfield College	3	1		4
5	Holmesglen TAFE	2	4	2	8
6a	North Coast Institute of TAFE: Coffs Harbour	2	3	3	8
6b	North Coast Institute of TAFE: Kingscliff	4	3	3	10
7	Oakey Senior High School	6	3	3	12
8	Padbury High School	5	1	1	7
9a	Sydney Institute of TAFE	4	2	1	7
9b	Sydney Institute of TAFE	3	1	3	7
	Totals	38	30	32	100

A brief description of the roles of support staff and external stakeholder participants involved in each focus group interview is set out in Appendix 3.

## ORGANISATIONAL DATA AND DOCUMENTS

To support the qualitative information provided during focus group interviews, documentation relating to the target programs was also collected by interviewers. This material included program brochures, course structures, timetables, news sheets, journal articles, conference presentations, advertising used for students, parents and the broader community as well as data on enrolments and completions where it was available. This material was not intensively analysed, but rather provided the essential detail required to understand course structures, content and processes in place to support delivery of the vocational programs that were the focus of the study.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Tape recordings and notes of the focus group interviews were transcribed. From the transcriptions, major themes and sub-themes were identified relating to the research questions and draft evaluative framework. These themes were then populated by supporting detail from the transcriptions and the organisational documents. 'Within' and 'cross case' analysis of data was undertaken in order to discover consistencies, variations and interrelationships within the data.

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## THE EVALUATIVE FRAMEWORK

The major tasks of this study were to:

- identify the particular characteristics of vocational programs offered by TAFE institutes, vocational colleges and trade schools that are viewed by teachers, support staff and external stakeholders as critical for successful retention and completion to Year 12 and transition to further education or employment.
- examine the relationships between these critical characteristics and to determine the influence of various educational settings, contexts and models of program delivery on student outcomes.
- formulate a framework against which existing vocational programs could be evaluated and new ones developed.

As a starting point, the key success factors for upper secondary skilling that were formulated in a TAFE Directors Australia - Australian College of Educators forum in Hobart in 2008 were used as a framework for examining the various vocational programs included in the study. These key success factors were couched in terms of what providers might do to enhance retention, completion and transition of young people through vocational programs. In a slightly modified form these factors included:

1. Developing an environment that demonstrates to students and parents that vocational pathways have parity in outcome and esteem with parallel academic programs.
2. Providing strong pastoral care, personal concern and access to career counselling services.
3. Having a substantial general education program that is occupationally relevant but that can lead to further study.
4. Adopting a view that basic literacy and numeracy are fundamental skills for further education.
5. Involving social partnerships with employers, educationalists and the community.
6. Providing structured learning in real work settings.
7. Utilising applied and project based methodology.
8. Attempting to maximise outcomes for students socially, occupationally and educationally with a set of extra-curricular activities, and utilise sport and outdoor education as areas to promote social skills and teamwork.
9. Having a clear identity, which builds student self-esteem and a sense of pride, encompassing work based learning, respecting the unique needs of all students.
10. Having a focus on student's individual needs and interests.
11. Providing a structured framework for skills development and pathways into work.

The extensive review of the literature confirmed and enhanced the success factors identified in the TDA documentation. The literature review covered vocational education and training for young people, early-school leaving and research and evaluation studies on the content, focus and outcomes of programs specifically designed to prevent attrition from senior secondary studies. On analysis, the key success factors can be categorised under the following broad headings:

- Targeted information
- Identification of needs
- Effective monitoring
- Quality teaching
- Coordinated support
- The development of connections
- Organisational leadership

Table 3 sets out a summary of the key success categories highlighted within the literature together with a summary of strategies identified as integral to each of the factors. This listing formed the draft evaluative framework for the gathering of data in each of the case study sites.

Table 3: Draft Evaluative Framework

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS AND IDENTIFIED STRATEGIES	
Success Factors	Strategies
<b>Leading</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear direction and maintenance of an organisational climate that supports success</li> <li>• Key players with the capacity to operate with ambiguity</li> <li>• Management of multi-agency activities and cultures</li> <li>• Support for intelligent risk-taking and learning from failure</li> </ul>
<b>Informing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality information about options and opportunities provided in a range of forms</li> <li>• Positive presentation of VET as a viable pathway to further education, training and work</li> <li>• Guidance tailored to suit individual needs</li> <li>• Early career counselling available</li> </ul>
<b>Identifying</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student expectations elicited and needs assessed</li> <li>• Early recognition and assessment of students at risk</li> <li>• Development of personalized learning plans</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A culture of attendance established</li> <li>• Consistent measuring of student engagement</li> <li>• Early alerts and interventions initiated</li> <li>• Ongoing evaluation of delivery, support services and outcomes</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joined up/ coordinated support mechanisms</li> <li>• Inclusive school environment and practices</li> <li>• Individualised and cohort specific pastoral care</li> <li>• Social networking utilised as an engagement and educational tool</li> <li>• Supportive relationships with peers encouraged and supported</li> <li>• Mentoring and coaching available</li> <li>• Positive learning and social outcomes showcased</li> </ul>
<b>Teaching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tailored curriculum</li> <li>• Learning styles, learning preferences and diversity acknowledged and accommodated</li> <li>• Focus on learner-centred delivery</li> <li>• Where feasible, learning personalised to individual interests</li> <li>• Integrated vocational and foundation skills development</li> <li>• Applied and experiential work-related and work-based learning approaches</li> <li>• Teamwork encouraged through collaborative learning</li> <li>• Engagement enhanced through the use of new media</li> <li>• Authentic and flexible assessment approaches adopted</li> <li>• Ongoing critical review of what works and what does not</li> </ul>
<b>Connecting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students to teachers</li> <li>• Students to school activities, during and outside school</li> <li>• Students to sources and resources</li> <li>• Students to the community</li> <li>• Students to employers</li> <li>• Facilitated and structured pathways into further education and work</li> </ul>

In addition to this framework, an attempt was made to identify the potential sources of evidence that would give some substance to the measurement of student success gained through undertaking vocational programs were identified. These potential evidence sources are set out in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Potential sources of evidence

Source	Evidence types
Organisational data and information sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of indicators of success: quality, quantity and outcomes</li> <li>• Monitoring approaches: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ attendance records</li> <li>○ unit of competency/module completion rates</li> <li>○ qualifications awarded</li> <li>○ follow-up surveys of graduates and non-completers</li> <li>○ employment gained</li> <li>○ tracking of pathways to further education and training</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Evaluation without independent assessment (formative evaluations) including evidence of continuous improvement activities</li> <li>• Evaluation with independent assessment including evidence of continuous improvement activities</li> <li>• Satisfaction surveys: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ participants in program/intervention</li> <li>○ parents</li> <li>○ industry/employers</li> <li>○ community agencies</li> <li>○ partner organisations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Local or national awards gained</li> <li>• Case study previously written up locally or nationally</li> <li>• Impact/benefit studies undertaken</li> <li>• Benchmarking activities</li> </ul>
Program documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content and method of approach adopted documented such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ provider training courses</li> <li>○ information and disseminations strategies</li> <li>○ resources in support</li> <li>○ partner agreements</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Cost-effectiveness data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost and benefits studies undertaken</li> <li>• Analysis of resources committed</li> </ul>
Replication as a quality indicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program or intervention replicated by others</li> <li>• Benchmarking</li> </ul>
Evidence of sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constancy of funding sources</li> <li>• Engagement of partners in delivery and support</li> <li>• Mainstreamed or special purpose funding</li> </ul>

The draft evaluative framework and the listing of potential evidence sources guided the research team in their gathering of data within each case study site, and shaped the analysis and reporting of the voices and documents from the field<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that following the testing of the framework with the various vocational programs being offered across the nine case study sites, the framework itself was evaluated and modified to improve its relevance and ease of use. The enhanced version of the evaluative framework together with some suggestions for its application in the field is included in the following section of this report.

## FINDINGS

The findings reveal that, despite some differences across jurisdictions in program type and award, there were many common features contributing to the engagement, retention and transition of young people in vocational education programs. The findings suggest that programs need to be flexible; that quality teaching is important; and that vocational education is valued by students and staff involved in the programs. However, these programs do not work in isolation and the need for support for the students is also critical. The importance of connecting with students, parents, the community and industry were highlighted. Barriers to engagement, retention and transition were also explored. Participants suggested that the things that got in the way of success in vocational programs tended to be issues around the status of VET, logistical problems, the high costs of supporting these programs and associated funding issues together with the lack of data to accurately monitor engagement, completions and transitions to further study or the workplace.

## DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING TRAINING NEEDS

It is evident from both the literature and the case studies that states and territories and individual educational institutions are developing distinctly different suites of programs to meet the needs of students interested in undertaking vocational education and training programs. Diversity of offerings and flexibility in delivery are viewed by informants to this study as critical factors in attracting, engaging and retaining and ultimately transitioning young people into further study or employment. The nine case studies provide evidence of some of the programs available for those students interested in following a vocational pathway to Year 12 and beyond. Some programs are designed to attract and retain young people who have disengaged from traditional education, while others offer students with an alternative pathway to Year 12, apprenticeships, traineeships, further education and the labour market. Whilst a number of these vocational programs have been developed to directly address the needs of students who might be termed 'at risk' of not persisting with their education, others are being undertaken by highly motivated young people who see value in gaining vocational qualifications in combination with a senior secondary certificate.

Table 5: Vocational programs

	Organisation	Program type
1	Adelaide Hills Vocational College	South Australian Certificate of Education, Vocational Certificates I and II
2	Canberra Institute of Technology	Vocational Year 10 (Access10) and Year 12 streams, YARDS program
3	Challenger TAFE	Youth at risk program
4	Copperfield	School-based vocational stream: VCAL and VETiS
5	Holmesglen TAFE	Certificate I in Vocational Preparation, VCAL, VCE units and VETiS
6	North Coast Institute of TAFE	TVET units or School-Based apprenticeships and traineeships in combination with NSW Higher School Certificate
7	Oakey Senior High School	VETiS
8	Padbury High School	VETiS through a Flexible Learning Centre
9	Sydney Institute of TAFE	TVET units or School-Based apprenticeships and traineeships in combination with NSW Higher School Certificate Certificates

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The TAFE NSW approach has been to introduce Trade Schools that offer students in Years 11 and 12 a broad range of vocational options and opportunities. Trade Schools are marketed as ‘different’, offering young people in their senior secondary years an opportunity to earn as well as learn. Students undertake a part-time apprenticeship or traineeships and earn a part-time training wage whilst completing a Higher School Certificate. Combining HSC with vocational training allows students to gain valuable work skills and experience and gain a nationally recognised VET qualification while still at school. There is also considerable potential for students to get a ‘head start’ on a career by using the qualifications obtained through a Trade School to transition into further study into a full apprenticeship, other studies or employment in their chosen industry.

The two Sydney Institute - St George Trade School programs included in the case studies provide evidence of the effectiveness of this approach for engaging, retaining and providing young people with pathways to further study and work in the health and automotive industries. Both Nursing and Automotive Studies at St George Trade School attract significant numbers of students undertaking their senior secondary years of school and selection processes are applied to ensure that only the most highly motivated of students are able to undertake the programs.

In contrast, the Victorian approach has been not only to provide credit from VET in Schools programs to the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) but also to offer the accredited qualification – the Victorian Certificate in Applied Learning (VCAL). The VCAL has three levels - Foundation, Intermediate and Senior, all of which are offered by the Holmesglen Vocational College and Copperfield College, included as cases in this study. This provides a hands-on option for students in Years 11 and 12: it is designed to develop practical work-related experience as well as literacy and numeracy skills and the opportunity to build personal skills that are important for life and work. The VCAL units provide credit to the VCE.

Other significantly more tailored programs have been specifically designed to target, engage and retain young people who are in danger of disengaging or who have already disconnected from traditional schooling. These include programs offered by the Adelaide Hills Vocational College, YARP at Challenger TAFE, Skills Pathways for Youth programs at North Coast Institute and Access 10 and YARDS at Canberra Institute of Technology

V Tracks, offered by the North Coast Institute, is an early intervention vocational program for Aboriginal students in Years 8 through to 10 and, as such, represents a significant change of approach in implementing VET in schools. This non-assessable program provides tasters across a broad range of vocational areas so that younger students and their parents are able to see what might be possible in the way of vocational training and employment in the future. Whilst the V Tracks program is relatively new, there is clear evidence that it is opening up vocational pathways into Years 11 and 12 and on into mainstream programs offered by TAFE.

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## FLEXIBILITY: AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN ENGAGEMENT

Flexibility was an important element commented on in all case studies with flexibility taking on different dimensions in different sites and for different cohorts. The need for flexibility was seen as relevant for a range of program aspects. These included: timetabling, the length of class times, program curriculum, and the timing of support. Program flexibility means students ‘have the opportunity to try out different trades’ and also have more time within programs to try out their potential. This willingness to build flexibility into programs was contrasted by focus group participants with academic programs offered by Boards of Studies: ‘the trouble is the HSC is very inflexible. It’s a very difficult qualification and it is quite inflexible’.

Staff highlighted the importance of class timing especially for trade subjects. The view was that flexible timing, rather than norm of a fixed (45 or 50 minute) class was desirable as ‘Chopping and changing after a lesson is just, you know, they don’t get anything done. Don’t get anything achieved’. Smaller class sizes were also mentioned as a factor contributing to flexibility: ‘it’s a huge cost to the school but this is the cohort, these are

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the kids we have and if we're trying to assist them to get to a pathway that is the best for them then we have to look outside the square and only have 15 kids in the class'.

Other forms of flexibility were also offered as important elements of successful programs. For example, the need for what could be termed 'just in time' support was explained as: 'I think one of the most important things, is that we deal with issues when they arise as much as we can accommodate. Because if you're not there to talk to them when they want to talk to you they often tend to just disappear.' Or for what might be seen as the most extremely disengaged and vulnerable learners needing to find a way back into education: 'we see each individual student in their place, their home, if in fact they've got one outside of campus.'

At the same time, a number of the case studies identified ways in which educational institutions were adjusting their delivery strategies in an attempt to enhance student engagement and facilitate retention and transition. One significant change of approach is the fast tracking of students so that they are able to undertake nationally-recognised qualifications in parallel with senior secondary studies at a time and in a manner that best suits their needs. Summer schools, block release, work placement undertaken during holidays are being used as a means of encouraging completion by maximizing the opportunities for learning to take place.

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## QUALITY TEACHING: THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Highlighted in every case was the concept that vocational programs for young people demand the very best teaching possible. Programs included in this study were seen to offer an overall flexibility and the ability to accommodate the needs of young people, as opposed to telling them 'this is what we've got, you have to come to us, this is what you do.' Teachers in VET programs saw their programs as different from schools because the programs were able to offer students a variety of industries that were not available in school programs. For example, a teacher suggested that 'by the time they have completed VCAL senior, they have already tried four different streams and it gives them an opportunity to know what they want to do in life'. Another teacher added that these industry programs are substantial in content as they were a full semester experience. They were not necessarily brief programs or tasters. As one trade teacher expressed: 'it's an introduction to a different type of education and training than they get at school. So it's that bridge to encourage them to think post-school what their options are.' Relevance and authenticity were seen to be key features of the teaching approach with a teacher in hospitality suggesting that the emphasis was on trying 'to make everything as realistic to the situation as possible'.

Not only are the overall structures of such programs flexible, but so is the curriculum content. Teachers discussed working in teams to prepare resources to support delivery of units in the area of literacy and numeracy. For example: 'teachers work together really well and we're interested in the same topics. And if you've got lots of people sort of putting into a project or a unit of work, it's a lot easier for everybody'. Another teacher adds: 'and it makes it so interesting for the students'. For the majority of programs, it was common for learning to be tailored to suit individuals' needs, with personalised learning plans put in place to guide students through to successful completion. This was mentioned by teachers in large metropolitan contexts as well as smaller providers.

Also seen as important was the need to shift the way success is framed in vocational programs. One student counsellor commented that: 'you know, all students come here with different skills and it's embracing that and maybe going with their strengths and getting outcomes from them in perhaps a different way.' This attitude of looking for a person's existing strengths, of utilising the experience and interests they come to VET with, was echoed in many discussions by all staff who commented on program success.

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Teachers of these programs knew that no matter how well something worked one year, it may not always work so well with a different cohort the next year. Teachers reflected on their curriculum delivery and acknowledged the need to adapt and alter to meet new challenges. A teacher in the literacy and numeracy program at a VET provider offered: 'We review what works really well and what didn't work and we try to offer new programs each year as well. We change, we live in a changing environment, and what has been very popular two years ago is not popular anymore so why deliver it?' Focus group participants understood that this sometimes required them to undertake continuing and often special professional development activities to keep up to speed with new ways of working. Teachers were also aware that there was a need to use different strategies for different classes: 'like sometimes it's a case of developing work with students in a negotiated way'. Teachers acknowledged that if the students find the work boring, they will stop attending, so developing engaging material was important.

A student-centred approach was also consistently identified as a crucial factor in teaching, as was the need to provide challenges for students in a supportive environment.

We encourage the students every step of the way. They may get half the answer right, so that's really good. So the emphasis is on what they are doing right, not what they are doing wrong. So it's on encouraging the student to do their best but also to accept that we all have things we're going to find easy to learn and more difficult to learn and that's okay'.

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## SUCCESS IS ABOUT CONNECTING

Two related ideas permeated through the interviews on success factors and strategies for youth. These two words are: 'Partnerships' and 'Relationships'. Whilst not identical in meaning, these factors are interconnected and inclusive of a wide range of stakeholders involved in supporting and developing strong and effective vocational programs. Rather than draw on a legal definition, if 'partnership' is seen in its dictionary definition as 'a cooperative relationship between people or groups who agree to share responsibility for achieving some specific goal' (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/partnership>), then successful programs tended to combine these two as mechanisms for success. In this way, a range of organisational and personal practices fall under these two ideas to support training development, skill development, learning outcomes, completions rates, behaviour management, risk factors and the health and safety of young people.

Partnerships were described as critically important and some providers work actively with Partnership Brokers and Community Liaison staff who have the role of supporting education and training and disengaged youth across a community or region. Partners include TAFE institutes, other secondary schools, but also other key stakeholders such as business and industry, community agencies, and parents and families. The development of one partnership was described by VET Co-ordinator like this:

There were a number of agencies that I was in communication with that were keen to create programs that would satisfy their requirements for take-ups in certain industry sectors. But those partnerships all came together at one time and we created this sort of process whereby kids are learning within our vocational programs here, transitioning through in the local community specifically.

An Education Manager and teacher within VET programs describes the importance and the complexity of developing partnerships when combining, for example a year 12 program, with VET offerings: 'we're still evolving ways of doing that better because it is quite complex and it involves working together with different people and that's quite – I mean it's not that it's difficult, it's not that people make it difficult, but just it takes a lot of time and communication and effort to make that happen'.

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The second factor, building relationships, was considered an important practice to keep young people positive and engaged with learning. For the most part it is described as developing caring and supportive relationships between teachers and students, between teachers and families and between young people and their peers. Where Aboriginal students are involved, it is also critical that teachers and support staff actively engage with the local communities to encourage and facilitate the participation of young Aboriginal students. However, it was also acknowledged that teachers need the time and space to build relationships.

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## THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT

The youth in these programs tend – on the whole – to need a lot of support. Participants in every focus group made reference to the importance of working with youth as ‘everybody’s business’, teachers, support staff, industry, the community and parents. Not all young people return to education and training ‘ready’ to engage with their education. They bring personal issues related to health, mental health and basic needs that in the end become part of the work that teachers and support staff take on in their attempts to retain students. An example of this type of student is offered by a teacher who describes one of her students as a young person who had previously had a very difficult relationship with education and labels herself ‘as being unsuitable for a classroom environment’. The young woman had ‘a very negative view of education, and a very, very negative view of herself and her abilities’.

It is not unusual for some of these young students to have a lot of needs and to therefore require a range of support systems. As a consequence, there is a need for teachers to work closely with support staff within and beyond the school or institute. Working with community agencies and parents is part and parcel of the role that most teachers and support staff take when working with such students, particularly those deemed to be at risk of disengaging from education and training. As one TAFE teacher suggested, ‘these are young people who have personal family problems or mental health issues that are not going to be resolved just because they are in a different program’. A different perspective, however, was presented by a student advisor who thought that returning to education ‘actually offers an opportunity for some of the people to actually belong to something’.

Evidence from all case study sites indicates that this student cohort needs a lot of support not just to learn but also in the personal arena. Whatever support is provided needs to be coordinated or ‘joined-up’ and all who are involved need to maintain clear communication to ensure that the support provided best meets the individual needs of students. Encapsulating this view, a focus group participant commented: ‘It’s not just this program’s business or this funding body’s business, it’s everybody’s business, it’s every Australian’s business...It’s every single person’s business’.

Whilst much of the discussion in focus groups centred on support for students engaging in vocational programs, participants also highlighted the importance of supporting the development of their own skills and knowledge about working with young people. A number of teachers commented that they were able to access relevant professional development in the areas of dealing with young people with mental illness or drug and alcohol addiction, dealing with students with a history of violence, managing diversity in student cohorts and the use of new technologies in teaching. They also stressed how important it was for teachers and support staff to work closely together, sharing knowledge and experiences and building expertise and confidence. The role played by youth workers in supporting teachers was of particular value in dealing with the day to day issues that often arose with young people deemed to be at risk of disengaging from education or training. There was some recognition however, that for some of the older teachers in TAFE, working with young students was sometimes a struggle. However, professional development programs and budgets, mentoring and networking were all seen to be readily accessible for those that wanted to engage in development activities.

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## THE IMPACT OF VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS ON RETENTION AND TRANSITION

In describing their programs for young people, the majority of focus group participants commented that these programs were relevant, work-related, engaging, flexible, supportive and, very often, fun. Regardless of the format, students generally enjoyed the experiences they were having in the vocational programs they were undertaking. In TAFE settings, the programs and the environment were perceived to be very different from school and even when students had not completed a work placement they could still see the relationship of what they were doing to their lives and the possibility of work down the track. It was suggested that this was not necessarily the case for students taking a more academic route in Years 11 and 12.

Teachers and support staff also made reference to vocational education and training located in larger training organisations (as opposed to a secondary school) as offering young people the opportunity to ‘have a clean slate’ or be seen in a ‘different light’ or to avoid the ‘labelling’. As one participant suggested, ‘I think vocational education sometimes gives that opportunity for people to be seen in a different light and can’t be underestimated as to where it can take people’. Participants who work with young people perceived that stigmas follow students even when they change secondary school, that students often carry a ‘history’ with them from school that is not a part of how they are perceived within their new environment. This allows students to develop confidence and competence in new ways and/or in new directions: ‘I think, and it’s a terrible thing to say, but I think there’s a lot of labelling that goes on a lot of the time so they can come here and take the label off’.

Teachers in TAFE consistently made the case that they were promoting the opportunities and pathways that VET offered while constantly building the relationship with industry so that their students could be made aware of the vocational possibilities. Emphasising this point, one participant commented ‘you know it is like separate careers advising as you go’. From the perspective of a partnership broker, the real ‘carrot’ for many students was getting to work in industry as part of their training. The practical nature of programs is attractive to many students. Reinforcing this view one teacher delivering both TVET and trade programs noted that early exposure to hands on applications is appealing to young people and the transition from taster programs to Year 12 TAFE-delivered VET with its more theoretical components did lead to positive outcomes some students would not otherwise achieve.

Trade teachers made the comment that even if a student did not continue in a particular trade, they still developed valuable and helpful life skills in their training courses, an aspect confirmed within the literature on young people and vocational education (Muir, Mullan, Powell, Flaxman, Thompson & Griffiths 2009). For example, an Automotive teacher put it like this: ‘half the class said that, *I’m here to be able to do my own car*. You know, they turn around and say, *I think every man should be able to do something to their car*, and I thought okay, great.’ Another example is taken from a hospitality teacher and offers a similar comment: ‘And even if they don’t go into the industry they’ll know how to cook a reasonably healthy meal without too much stress’. Not only does vocational education offer life skills, it also provides the learner with an opportunity to get a sense of a trade, it is seen as an introduction to a system different to schools and a bridge to opportunity while at the same time providing ‘dignity and a sense that they’re doing something, they’re productive’.

This point was confirmed by a head teacher when responding to the question ‘What is it about your programs that encourages young people to remain in education and training?’ He stated:

I think it is the sense that they’re doing a Certificate Level 3, Health Services Assistance, so they’re doing a particular program. When they first start, we tell them what it can lead to. We say, look, when you finish this program, okay, you will have a Certificate Level 3 in Health Services Assistance. This is a calibre of worker who is currently being employed in aged care, in public hospitals, in the private sector. Now the day that you finish this program you can apply for a job that’s in the newspaper that says ‘Wanted: Health Services Assistance’. You have the qualification....Obviously a lot of them find that a very comforting

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thought because they know they've got something. That's what the whole thing is about...having somebody who is work-ready. They're not experienced but they are work-ready and we include as much within the program that is going to facilitate that process.

This close connection with the real world of work would seem to be an important factor in success, for it demonstrates that vocational programs can gain considerable credibility with the end-users of the product – individual employers and industry more broadly. In this study it is evident that those schools and TAFE institutes that have developed close and long-term working relationships with businesses are in the best position to facilitate successful completion and the transition of young people from their vocational programs, through school-based apprenticeships, traineeships, higher level qualifications and on into employment.

While these programs are probably the ideal, many of the other vocational programs presented in this report perform an equally important enabling role – setting young people off on a pathway that builds their vocational interests as well as their foundation and vocational skills while providing them with a vision of the options and opportunities that may ensue from successful completion. When well delivered and supported, the real value in these programs is that they offer young people the opportunity to:

- Engage in practical, hands-on skills development in areas of personal and vocational interest
- Try out a range of vocational options prior to making a decision about a specific vocation or pathway
- Undertake units of competency from Training Packages in conjunction with language, literacy and numeracy skills development
- Complete a senior secondary certificate in combination with a nationally recognised vocational qualification
- Participate in part-time study whilst learning and earning in part-time employment through school-based apprenticeships or traineeships
- Experience authentic workplaces with their associated workplace procedures, standards, expectations and cultures
- Access work-related career advice, work placements and work experience to build understanding and support career and pathway selection
- Gain credit for vocational studies undertaken and access clearly delineated pathways into higher level qualifications in mainstream TAFE courses
- Develop vocational skills, knowledge and employability skills together with a level of job readiness in preparation for work
- Obtain early attachment to the labour market, particularly when intending to follow a post-school employment pathway

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## WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF SUCCESS

The vocational programs highlighted in these case studies consistently provided evidence of the key success factors in action. What also were revealed in the focus group discussions were the things that get in the way of greater program and student success. The major hurdles were perceived to be the limited status of vocational education and training in the eyes of some parents, careers advisors and school teachers; logistical issues that arise from the different ways that schools and TAFE operate together with the requirements that are placed upon students when they are undertaking vocational programs. Funding of programs was also a significant and consistent theme in focus group discussions.

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## THE STATUS OF VET ISSUE

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In discussing things that would make a difference to vocational programs for young people, the need for a better understanding of VET, or the demystification of it, was seen to be a major issue across a number of the case study sites. There was general agreement that whilst there was a lot of information about vocational programs disseminated from a range of sources, many parents still do not know about or understand the options and the possibilities that vocational education and training offer. This problem was exacerbated to some extent where students were enrolled in vocational programs that had no Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank. In New South Wales for example, students who commenced TAFE-delivered vocational education and training programs in Year 11 tended to drift away from the programs in Year 12 to focus on their HSC. Clearly the influence of parents may be a significant factor in this phenomenon.

Many focus group participants were frustrated by the lack of status that VET has in the community, particularly when so many students undertake vocational units only as a stop-gap measure or as an 'easy' option in the latter two years of their senior secondary school. Railing against the lack of parity of esteem of VET, one participant commented:

I think VET is recognised as a fabulous second chance for a lot of different groups. I think we could do more around making it a first choice so that young people in schools, careers advisors in schools, parents go 'a VET education is something that my young person, or me as a young person, can aspire to'. And there's nothing wrong with that. It's no less than aspiring to go to university'.

## LOGISTICAL ISSUES

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When considering the barriers to successful participation in vocational education and training a number of logistical or structural issues arose through the discussions. For example, focus group participants across many of the sites spoke of timetable clashes between schools and VET providers, a lack of flexibility within timetables and within courses particularly when combining VET units with senior secondary qualifications such as VCE and HSC. For some students, they were confronted with longer sessions and longer days in VET compared to schools and whilst they were away undertaking units in TAFE they were often missing critical classes in their academic units which they were then required to make up in some way. Quite often this was viewed as over-burdening those who were least likely to be able to carry the additional load.

It was evident however that where schools, TAFE and employers worked closely together, many of these structural barriers could be overcome. Those individuals with responsibility for liaison or the maintenance of relationships between organizations clearly play a critical role in ensuring students are not disadvantaged through their involvement in vocational programs in TAFE and work placements in industry.

Another fundamental logistical barrier that appeared in different guises in different geographic locations was the impact of travelling to and from home and places of study and/or workplace experience. Issues with transport appear not only in remote or regional areas, but in metropolitan areas as well – albeit for different reasons.

One provider suggested that the transition to travel may be difficult for students because they are used to going to a school (primary and secondary) close to home. However, the move into a VET environment or to the workplace requires a significant adjustment on the part of a young person. Discussing the difference between school environment and VET, a trade teacher commented that 'some of them finish at 6:00 at night and in wintertime, it's dark and, you know they're starting to fall asleep.' From a metropolitan secondary school came the suggestion that 'parents are scared for them to travel' and 'parents don't like their children to travel on public transport and they certainly don't like them to travel a lot'. Although some teachers may think that parents are being 'overprotective', a VET Co-ordinator from a regional area noted that 'the transport issue, it

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comes up every time and lots of people say - Oh well that's logistics and we can organise that - but the reality is, it's a huge barrier. And so we have school-based trainees'

A barrier to successful transition for some young Aboriginal students is their reluctance to travel away from their communities, particularly when they do not have a great deal of choice in terms of industry and jobs in their local area. As a consequence, it was suggested that 'there's often the danger that the kids become professional students and just do certificate after certificate which the community is quite sick of...they want to see more pathways for kids'.

In situations where young people are in accommodation for homeless youth, their housing and the provider they access may be located some distance from each other. An example comes from a teacher who explains that the accommodation is about 45km down the road and while there is a bus service, there is only 'one there and one back'. He adds: 'and then they have to pay \$12.00. Where are they getting \$12.00 a day to come here?'

Whether students use public transport or parents drive them, transporting young people to a range of locations on different days for different purposes remains a logistical issue, and for some, an expensive one.

## FUNDING ISSUES

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Many participants spoke about issues related to funding, and particularly about the costs associated with supporting young students in vocational programs. In the majority of cases described in this study, the extensive support strategies being employed required close cooperation and coordination between vocational teachers, Language, Literacy and Numeracy teachers, counselors, career guidance staff, youth workers, community agencies and industry liaison personnel. Sustaining such a high level of student support was seen in almost every instance to be a costly but essential element in achieving successful student outcomes.

Teachers and support staff alike were concerned that the true costs of support needed to be more openly acknowledged in the funding of programs especially those combining part-time work, part-time VET and other study. It was noted in a number of instances that students often needed more time to complete the required units of competency in combination with a senior secondary certificate because they have an additional load to carry. Others require additional time at TAFE because they do not have ready access to authentic workplaces in which to practice and build their vocational skills. Finally, other students demand additional time and support as they do not have foundational skills such as language, literacy and numeracy.

Disparate funding sources between schools and TAFE and policies dictating how funding is to be expended were also seen to present barriers to more effective partnerships being established between organisations. In some jurisdictions, the way VET in Schools was funded and the way TAFE programs were funded differed, generating inconsistencies and seeming inequities in provision. For example, in New South Wales when school students undertake TAFE-delivered vocational education and training programs as part of their Years 11 and 12, part of the school funding is transferred to the TAFE institute. It was suggested that some school teachers concerned about the loss of funding, are not highly supportive of TVET programs perceiving that such a loss of funding impacts negatively on the school from which the students are drawn.

When offered the opportunity to suggest improvements to how things were currently being done, participants made specific suggestions with regard to funding. These included:

- Providing financial incentives to schools and TAFE to jointly deliver skill sets/qualifications in a broader range of vocational areas, particularly for disengaged youth. Often funding for such programs was 'one-off' which meant that programs could not be sustained or quality staff retained when the

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funding was no longer available. As a consequence, the best of teachers and support staff were reticent about committing to these programs, despite the evident need for a range of students to undertake them.

- Establishing a funding source that would allow schools in partnership with other training providers and industry to commence vocational programs for young people in Years 8, 9 and 10. Whilst it was acknowledged that vocational options needed to be limited because of the age of these students, it was possible for students to be introduced to different industries and different occupations whilst acquiring some of the foundation competencies from a range of Certificate 1 qualifications. The value of this approach was seen to be an early immersion in VET which could lead to ongoing engagement and completion of Year 12 and the opening up of pathways to further study and employment.
- Giving consideration to fee assistance or scholarships to young students who are transitioning from school-based or TAFE-delivered VET in schools programs into mainstream higher level TAFE programs with high material fees (eg. hairdressing, hospitality, floristry).
- Ensuring that programs that provide a blend of vocational learning with foundational skills development or VET programs that are of real interest to young people such as retail, tourism and beauty are funded in a similar manner as those that are specifically designed to meet skill shortages and the needs of industry, or those that focus on delivering higher level vocational qualifications.
- Maintaining funding at a level which ensures small class sizes for vocational programs are sustained and required support can be made available to meet the needs of individual students.
- Providing funding which offers the opportunity for organizations to re-design facilities and the physical environment differently to ensure optimum connectedness between young people, their teachers and those who support them.
- Simplifying the processes and documentation required to access various sources of funding for vocational programs for young people.
- Understanding that the government's emphasis on youth attainment and transitions, raised school leaving ages and the increasing popularity of VET in Schools will result in considerable growth in vocational programs and the capacity of schools and TAFEs to sustain the high levels of support these programs require will demand a concomitant growth in funding if positive student outcomes are to be achieved.

## MONITORING SUCCESS: DATA ISSUES

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Whilst a considerable amount of qualitative and documentary information was provided by participants in the twelve focus groups, gaining access to hard data about student enrolments, completions and transitions into further study and/or employment were generally not available to the researchers in any but the smallest organisation. Thus, much of what is presented in this report is based on anecdotal evidence drawn from the varying experiences and perceptions of those participating in focus groups.

Views about programs had been formally gathered from staff, students and employers in several instances, but none of the focus group participants indicated that they employed any systematic approach for doing this on a regular basis. Where schools and TAFE institutes were working together, databases generally did not 'talk to each other' and data were infrequently shared between organisations. Exemplifying this problem, it was noted in two cases that where students were undertaking a senior secondary certificate in combination with a vocational qualification, TAFE staff were generally unaware of whether students successfully completed the school qualification and similarly school staff were uncertain about the awarding of vocational qualifications.

More importantly, no formal strategies were in place to track the pathways undertaken by students after they had engaged in vocational programs, moreover what information was available about employment outcomes generally resided in the heads of individuals and was not necessarily shared with others. Participants

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understood the importance of having access to quality data about their programs, particularly as it could be used to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of programs; make a case for increased funding and staffing; and highlight the positive outcomes of programs to potential students, parents, industry and the broader community. A standardized approach to data collection and a strategy for tracking students through schools, apprenticeships and traineeships, higher level qualifications and into work were identified as an important issues requiring consideration. The concept of a unique identifier for students was also put forward by a number of participants and there was general agreement that it was the ideal solution to the problem of schools, TAFEs, policymakers and the public not knowing the true extent of successful student completion and transition from the vocational programs that they offered.

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## THE EVALUATIVE FRAMEWORK: TESTED AND EXPANDED

As previously outlined, one of the major tasks of this study was to identify the particular characteristics of vocational programs offered by TAFE institutes, vocational colleges and trade schools that teachers, support staff and external stakeholders perceived to be critical for successful retention and completion to Year 12 and transition to further education or employment. Another was to formulate a framework against which existing vocational programs could be evaluated and new ones developed.

The draft framework proposed that the key factors for success in vocational programs were likely to centre on organisational leadership, targeted information, identification of needs, effective monitoring, quality teaching, coordinated support and the development of connections and that a broad set of associated strategies underpinned these factors (see page 13). Tested in the field with the nine case studies, the framework proved to be a robust mechanism for identifying the factors that combine to make such programs effective and as such it has the potential to be used by others, particularly in the areas of program development, program management and program evaluation. In its revised form, the framework highlights some concrete examples of effective strategies which have been drawn from various case studies. This listing is by no means exhaustive and does not include all of the strategies identified by informants to this study.

In terms of planning new vocational programs for young people, the framework could be used as a prompt to systematically examine how new programs are placed to achieve their aims, such as: how the current organisational context could further the achievement of aims; how and what information is being provided to students; what kinds of monitoring strategies are built into the program; how links between students, teachers, employers and support systems are being fostered.

It could also be used as an evaluation tool for throwing light on what a specific program currently provides. In other words, a program might consider how and to what extent it provides elements of the key success factors: targeted information, effective monitoring, quality teaching, coordinated support, the development of student connections and organisational leadership. As a starting point, this would allow for discussion and action for quality improvement. This might be in terms of relationship between teachers and students, the pedagogy, the industry connections and the organisational context. Drawing on the evaluative framework as a guide, providers might ask questions such as: Does our organisation align with these factors and if so, to what extent? What developments would be necessary for improved retention and engagement? What resources are required and where can we raise these issues?

In simplest terms, the tested and expanded evaluative framework overleaf can be used as a checklist against which a new or existing program can be scrutinized.

## Revised Evaluative Framework

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS	
Success Factors and Strategies	Concrete examples from case studies
<p><b>Leading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear direction and maintenance of an organisational climate that supports success</li> <li>• Key players with the capacity to operate with ambiguity</li> <li>• Management of multi-agency activities and cultures</li> <li>• Support for intelligent risk-taking and learning from failure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic directions that espouse the values of vocational programs for all young people</li> <li>• Whole-of-organisation approach to the development, delivery and evaluation of outcomes of vocational programs</li> <li>• Commitment to engagement with key stakeholders in the development of policies, processes and programs associated with VET for young people</li> </ul>
<p><b>Informing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality information about options and opportunities provided in a range of forms</li> <li>• Positive presentation of VET as a viable pathway to further education, training and work</li> <li>• Early career counselling available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course specific information sessions for careers advisors, parents and potential students</li> <li>• Program information tailored to suit the information needs of particular audiences: young people generally, early-school leavers, parents and communities</li> <li>• Options and opportunities provided by vocational programs presented in a range of forms including information session, taster programs, open days, Try a Trade and the use of current students and industry people to present concrete stories about programs and job opportunities</li> <li>• Guidance on careers provided in schools by career counselors and TAFE staff</li> <li>• Providing opportunities for students in Years 8, 9 and 10 to try out vocational activities prior to making selection of programs and pathways</li> </ul>
<p><b>Identifying</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student expectations elicited and needs assessed</li> <li>• Early recognition and assessment of students at risk</li> <li>• Development of personalised learning plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Expressions of Interest and interviews prior to enrolment to ascertain student intentions and expectations</li> <li>• Testing of language, literacy and numeracy on enrolment</li> <li>• Individual learning plans negotiated, monitored and adapted according to learner needs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Monitoring</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A culture of attendance established</li> <li>• Consistent measuring of student engagement</li> <li>• Early alerts and interventions initiated</li> <li>• Ongoing evaluation of delivery, support services and outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance monitored and strategies put in place to follow-up non-attendance via phone calls or messages to schools</li> <li>• TVET liaison officers working closely with schools to encourage attendance and follow-up when problems occur</li> <li>• Coordinated approaches for supporting students when family circumstances/travel etc present barriers to ongoing engagement</li> <li>• Course review processes in place, together with student evaluations to ascertain levels of satisfaction and areas for change</li> <li>• Close collaboration between teaching and support staff to determine areas for improvement and adaptation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Supporting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joined up/ coordinated support mechanisms</li> <li>• Inclusive school environment and practices</li> <li>• Individualised and cohort specific pastoral care</li> <li>• Social networking utilised as an engagement and educational tool</li> <li>• Guidance tailored to suit individual needs</li> <li>• Supportive relationships with peers encouraged and supported</li> <li>• Mentoring available</li> <li>• Positive learning and social outcomes showcased</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close collaboration and coordination between vocational teachers, general education teachers and relevant support staff internal and external to the organization</li> <li>• Active engagement with partnership brokers, employment agencies, employers and industry representatives to facilitate effective work experience, work placements and employment</li> <li>• Access to home groups, homework groups, breakfast clubs and VET-focused social activities</li> <li>• Development of peer mentoring, peer tutoring and collaborative learning</li> <li>• Student access to industry mentors, preceptors and mentors</li> </ul>

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Success Factors and Strategies	Concrete examples from case studies
<p><b>Teaching</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tailored curriculum</li> <li>• Learning styles, learning preferences and diversity acknowledged and accommodated</li> <li>• Focus on learner-centred delivery</li> <li>• Learning personalised to individual interests</li> <li>• Integrated vocational and foundation skills development</li> <li>• Applied and experiential work-related and work-based learning approaches</li> <li>• Teamwork encouraged through collaborative learning</li> <li>• Ongoing critical review of what works and what does not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning needs assessed and learning plans initiated which acknowledge student interests and utilize student experiences as a foundation for experiential learning</li> <li>• Foundation skills development undertaken as part of vocational learning, facilitated through team teaching</li> <li>• Enhanced opportunities for building vocational skills in environments where workplaces cannot be accessed</li> <li>• Balanced approach to practical and theoretical learning to ensure ongoing engagement</li> <li>• Limitations on class sizes</li> <li>• Emphasis on employability skills development and orientation to the workplace</li> </ul>
<p><b>Connecting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students to students</li> <li>• Students to teachers</li> <li>• Students to school activities, during and outside school</li> <li>• Students to sources and resources</li> <li>• Students to the community</li> <li>• Students to employers</li> <li>• Facilitated and structured pathways into further education and work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer mentoring, student support networks, matching able students with less able students to support learning</li> <li>• Home groups, teacher mentor small numbers of student throughout their vocational program</li> <li>• Engaging employers in delivery of vocational programs and enhancing opportunities for work placements and work experience</li> <li>• Introducing students to community agencies and the services they provide</li> <li>• Developing agreed pathways with training providers and emphasizing the value of these pathways to students and parents.</li> </ul>

Possible evidence sources that may be examined to determine program effectiveness are listed below.

Source	Evidence types
Organisational data and information sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of indicators of success: quality, quantity and outcomes                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Monitoring approaches: attendance, unit of competency/module completion rates, qualifications awarded, employment gained and tracking of pathways to further education and training</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Evaluation without independent assessment (formative evaluations) including evidence of continuous improvement activities</li> <li>• Evaluation with independent assessment including evidence of continuous improvement activities</li> <li>• Satisfaction surveys: participants, parents, employers, partner organisations</li> <li>• Local or national awards gained</li> <li>• Case study previously written up locally or nationally</li> <li>• Impact/benefit studies undertaken</li> <li>• Benchmarking activities</li> </ul>
Program documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content and method of approach adopted documented such as:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ provider training courses</li> <li>○ information and dissemination strategies</li> <li>○ resources in support</li> <li>○ partner agreements</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Cost-effectiveness data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost and benefits studies undertaken</li> <li>• Analysis of resources committed</li> </ul>
Replication as a quality indicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program or intervention replicated by others</li> <li>• Benchmarking</li> </ul>
Evidence of sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constancy of funding sources</li> <li>• Engagement of partners in delivery and support</li> <li>• Mainstreamed or special purpose funding</li> </ul>

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## CASE STUDIES

The following pages contain a description of each of the cases included in this study. Each is reported against the key success factors outlined in the evaluative framework.

Case study 1	Adelaide Hills Vocational College
Case study 2	Canberra Institute of Technology Vocational College
Case study 3	Challenger TAFE
Case study 4	Copperfield College
Case study 5	Holmesglen Vocational College
Case study 6	TAFENSW - North Coast Institute of TAFE
Case study 7	Oakey Senior High School
Case study 8	Padbury Senior High School
Case study 9	TAFENSW -Sydney Institute St George Trade School

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## CASE STUDY 1: ADELAIDE HILLS VOCATIONAL COLLEGE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Located in the Adelaide Hills in South Australia, the Adelaide Hills Vocational College (AHVC) is attached to Mount Barker High School. It attracts students disengaged from mainstream schooling and referrals from the Mount Barker region as well as from Murray Bridge, Birdwood and Lobethal and other rural towns. Many of the young people who attend the College have low levels of literacy, come from dysfunctional families, suffer from mental illness and face significant personal issues including drug and alcohol abuse and violence. The AHVC has been described as offering 'a second chance program for young people who have either *voted with their feet*, been encouraged to leave mainstream schooling or have left to deal with personal issues. It provides senior secondary education to youth aged 16 years and over who would not otherwise be involved in education. The program enables students to achieve their SACE (South Australian Certificate of Education) and also provides access to vocational training, work placements, traineeships and job seeking skills. The young people involved range in academic ability from those with learning difficulties to high academic achievers. What unites them is that mainstream schooling did not work for them' (Cook & Bills 2005, p.3)

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### VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND QUALIFICATIONS OFFERED

Academic units in the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) together with the following Flexible Learning Options units: community studies, tourism, information technology, general construction are offered. Other units include literacy and mathematics for Work and Community, English Communications, Outdoor Education, Biology as well as the Stage 1 cross-disciplinary Personal Learning Plan which supports subject selection, careers information and preparation for career and other personal goals.

Qualifications available through the College are:

- South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE)
- Certificates I and Units of Competency in Employment Skills, Tourism operations, Construction and Information Technology.

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### PROGRAMS, STRUCTURE AND FOCUS

The AHVC offers Stage 1 and 2 SACE studies through a flexible delivery model that includes vocational studies, work placement, block lesson times, individual case management and learning plans. Forklift license, senior first aid, front end loader, sexual assault prevention and healthy relationships are also available. These courses were included in the students' SACE through the accredited Flexible Learning Options available through the accreditation processes within the SACE Board. In addition, students access VET courses including Certificate I in Employment Skills, Certificate I in Construction and Certificate 1 in Tourism Operations. Most Stage 1 students participate in a general Stage 1 SACE course, which covers all the compulsory SACE requirements as well as sufficient extra subjects to possibly complete twelve SACE units per student. Students who complete their SACE Stage 1 units for credit points are provided with a sufficient range of stage 2 subjects to allow them to follow any post-school options. This includes achieving a ranking for university entrance if required.

Access to funding through Youth Connections and Compact is allowing more units of competency to be offered, such as the Certificate I in Information Technology.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Assessed against the evaluative framework, this case study demonstrated the following evidence against the key success factors:

### TEACHING

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The teaching approach focuses very much upon adult learning principles and is structured in a way that allows students to plan their own curriculum thus enhancing the relevance to their needs and interests. Individual learning plans with a focus on Language, Literacy and Numeracy are negotiated. It is a highly flexible program which includes working closely with the youth worker to develop units on life skills which have been accredited for SACE. Block delivery is utilized which allows students to get fully involved in the learning activities. Teachers act as guides and mentors as students negotiate a personalised learning pathway. The program emphasises practical, hands-on learning activities. 'A vocational focus for this group of people is more likely to be successful than an academic focus'.

### SUPPORTING

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A youth worker (Youth Project Manager, Adelaide Hills Community Health Centre) is provided on site to deal with social and emotional issues as they arise. As a consequence a strong rapport has been developed with students. The Youth Worker is funded under the South Australian ICAN program Flexible Learning Options funding. Each student's path is individually negotiated, mapped and planned through interviews with students, teaching staff and the youth worker.

Peer support is a key aspect of the program: The approach '...focuses on what works for young people. We listen to what they have to say, and then we get them to help us to develop what it is they want and we also give them the information they need. We train them to become peer mentors, so they can go back into their groups of friends and spread the information about where they can get some help'.

Additional funding sources come from the Regional and Community Care and the Wyatt Foundation through the partnership with Lutheran Community Care. These funds support enhanced vocational programs. Options are limited by teacher expertise and access to appropriate training facilities. There is a desire for more vocational units to be offered as these are seen to be attractive to young people because of their relevance to future work or personal interests.

### CONNECTING

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The teachers are empathetic to the students' personal needs and have a sound understanding of the youth culture and issues facing young people in the local environment. They are clearly passionate about what they are doing. Students who have moved through the program have been case managed and no student leaves the program without an implemented exit plan. 'One of the things that we really focus on is that no student leaves our program without an option, or without either gaining employment, completing their SACE, going to university or TAFE or in a job agency or with a part-time job' .

The program includes input from other agencies that are supporting youth in the area through the SACE subjects offered. These include the Adelaide Hills Community Health Service, Employments Options, Centrelink, South Australian Police, Lutheran Community Care, Schools and Beyond and career centres regarding specific industries. 'Apart from involving these agencies directly with some of the community's 'at risk' young people...it also provides our students with a familiar face when they need to access these agencies'.

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By engaging students in community based learning, community groups become involved in the education process.

## INFORMING

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Students are interviewed prior to commencement so that they can understand how the program operates and what is required of them. It is stressed that AHVC is an adult learning environment and they have responsibilities with regard to how they behave within that environment. They also discuss the consequence of not doing so. This sets the scene for an honest dialogue to start happening. They understand that they must behave like adults to be treated as equals by the staff – respect is valued and encouraged.

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## EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- Increasing enrolments, from 35 in 2003 to 84 in 2010.
- Student attendance increases significantly the longer they are enrolled in the program
- In the period 2003-2007 the retention rate was over 80 per cent.
- Surveys of student opinion reveal student satisfaction with the program to be higher than similarly aged students in regional schools.
- Other community and employment agencies refer young people to the program.
- Generally students at AHVC take three years to complete SACE, however, completion rates are increasing annually. In 2009, 13 students completed SACE Stage 2. Some of those 13 went on to undertake TAFE programs. Some graduates have gone on to jobs in nursing and floristry. Others have commenced university programs.
- AHVC received a SA Great Award for Youth in 2004.
- Awarded a Certificate of Merit in Australian Crime & Violence Prevention Awards 2009 – ‘the goal is to provide opportunities for young people who have not succeeded in mainstream education and improve the potential for them to develop successful, productive lives. These opportunities include dealing with social barriers which are impacting on their lives, providing access to further education and training, creating career pathways and engaging young people in a positive way with the community. Outcomes achieved include young people finding employment, attending further education including tertiary studies, completing SACE, addressing social barriers and a reduction in juvenile justice issues’.
- Critically it is suggested that the enrolment of young people at the AHVC brings significant benefits for students and the wider community. The young people state that if they were not attending the college then they would not be attending education or training at all.

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## CASE STUDY 2: CANBERRA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY VOCATIONAL COLLEGE, ACT

Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) is the ACT's largest tertiary provider with four campuses throughout Canberra. The CIT Vocational College offers 'second chance' training and support options for a number of student groups including migrants, adults wanting to return to study, international students, language learners and early school leavers. Observational evidence supports the view of focus group participants that the CIT Vocational College's work is underpinned by a firm commitment by CIT management to supporting vulnerable learners.

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### VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND QUALIFICATIONS OFFERED

The CIT Vocational College's alternative Year 10 program (Access10) offers subsidised, accredited Certificate II courses that can be undertaken in a flexible manner consistent with students' individual circumstances. Its curriculum is developed internally but accredited externally. A number of electives complement core subjects in areas including English, Maths, Science, Australian Studies and Computing. Access10 is a program for people who have left high school early, are not able to satisfy TAFE entry requirements, are looking to up-skill for further vocational training, cannot attend classes or prefer to move through the program at their own pace. Flexible vocational studies electives allow students to count any vocational training towards their Access10 certificate, for example the trades, Community Development, Aged Care and Disability Services. Advanced units enable students to bridge from this program into a Year 12 program. Access10 is nationally accredited; it is listed on the AQF and has been passed by the ACT Registration Board.

The Vocational College's alternative Year 12 program has two streams: a tertiary stream and an accredited stream. These streams are designed to help students enter university (including gaining an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank), undertake vocational studies in specific trades or careers, or gain or improve their ACT Year 12 Certificates. Both streams are accredited through the Board of Senior Secondary Studies, and students choosing a vocational focus can achieve a Certificate III qualification in tandem with a Year 12 Certificate.

The YARDS program is a transition program for at-risk 15-25 year olds who face significant barriers to re-engaging with education or training. Participants can access support to develop their life skills, bridge learning gaps in their education and develop new educational pathways. This includes help with choosing and accessing vocational training opportunities. Many young people accessing YARDS transition into Access10, with continuing support from the YARDS team. YARDS offers flexible support, according to the students' needs.

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### PROGRAMS, STRUCTURE AND FOCUS

Of primary relevance to this study are the CIT Vocational College's Access10, Year 12 and YARDS programs. These programs are supported by complementary programs and services, which include the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP), the Learning Options literacy and numeracy program, the Student Advice Team and the English Language Centre. The CIT Vocational College also offers RPL and credit transfer processes. Together, these programs and services provide an interlaced 'net' of support for vulnerable or underserved student groups, and it is in their combination that the CIT Vocational College provides a best-practice model for this study.

Within the Access10 program, students undertake pathway planning as part of their core course load. Originally conceived as an alternative for mature aged students, Access10 now mainly caters for teenagers (15-17 years old) who do not fit into the mainstream education system. The program caters for around 120 students, of whom around 30 are under 16. Students within the Access10 program, as well as YARDS, are typically in difficult and dynamic home situations, and are dealing with a range of personal issues.

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The Year 12 program is by necessity less flexible than Access10 because it has to meet Board of Senior Secondary Studies delivery and assessment requirements; for instance courses have to be undertaken within two years, which precludes the 'drop in, drop out' arrangements developed for Access10. However some flexibility remains such as the ability for students to undertake 'tasters' of other CIT courses to help them decide where they want to go in the future, or to incorporate complete vocational certificates as part of their Year 12 Certificate. Students over 18 years of age can access abridged packages, which allow them to complete a Year 12 Certificate in one year.

YARDS offers different levels of support to students, according to their level of need and ability to engage productively with other educational options, such as part-time Access10. It is delivered by staff with youth work qualifications and experience who assist students on an individual basis as well as in group sessions.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Assessed against the evaluative framework, this case study demonstrated the following evidence against the key success factors:

### TEACHING

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CIT Vocational College staff members described their role as 'planting seeds' that grow in students and their families, so that even if students drop out, they are more likely to come back at some future time. Supporting this was a general agreement by focus group participants that CIT staff working at the 'coal face' with young people are supported by the institution and colleagues in a number of ways, including practical support mechanisms and the positive attitude of CIT staff towards students and each other.

Staff members expressed how important it is that students are not labelled as 'at risk' or 'difficult'. CIT Vocational College programs provide students with the opportunity to start with a 'clean slate', which can help to undo patterns of expected behaviours. Staff saw such patterns as self-fulfilling prophecies and cited examples of dramatic positive changes to students' behaviour once they had started to attend the Vocational College, as compared to their previous behaviour at school.

For teachers, engagement was a central factor in retaining young people studying in the CIT Vocational College. CIT Vocational College staff members actively evaluate issues related to engagement on an ongoing basis. One of the most important factors cited in this regard was relevance, particularly for 15 to 19 year old students.

**In terms of the Access10 program**, staff described themselves as educators who work with young people on a daily basis, rather than 'teachers'. The program is structured so that students can drop in and out at any time, and pick up where they left off upon returning. The current structure of the course, which has undergone a number of iterations over the past decade, arose out of the recognition that at-risk students have difficulty sitting and sticking with courses over the long term; they tend to attend, disappear and come back. Also observed was that many students in more structured school settings can sometimes automatically progress to the next year level whether or not they have attended throughout the year. This can leave large holes in their skills base.

Students work through short modules or subjects using self-paced materials (booklets and interactive computer activities). They are supported by teaching staff through timetabled group tutorials. The classroom environment is not a traditional classroom; teachers are described as 'waitressing to the students' in that they wander and chat to students about their studies as students work through their booklets at their own pace,

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providing 'just in time' teaching to assist students to progress through the course. This delivery mode means students can start at any time and progress at their own rate – both critical factors in the program's success. Some electives such as art and sport are delivered as group activities.

There are opportunities to 'try before you buy' in Access 10: students can undertake a range of individual vocational subjects that are part of TAFE Certificate courses. This counts towards both future post-school Certificate qualifications and the Year 10 Certificate. This dual strategy is seen as a highly successful motivator by staff. Class rules are informal and are developed by the class group. There are no attendance requirements but staff members constantly communicate the connection between success and perseverance. The average time that students stay in Access10 is around 18 months, although some motivated students have completed the course in as little as 12 weeks.

**The Year 12 program** is of necessity less flexible than Access10, because it needs to meet external assessment and timing requirements set by the BSSS. However, it is in the combination of vocational and school elements that the Year 12 program's strengths lie. Co-ordinators and support staff individually guide students through the rigorous requirements that students have to meet in order to undertake the BSSS-accredited Year 12 course, and then follow up with future career and pathway planning negotiations. In particular, the welcoming attitude and practical help provided by the program's administrative staff were seen as an important success factor; these staff members work directly with students on negotiating paperwork and are a first point of contact. They also undertake highly complex administrative tasks working with a number of different compliance systems. This, however, is resource-intensive work.

## SUPPORTING

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CIT provides an interlocking web of support for students. This web includes youth specialists, career advisors and administrative staff; there may be up to three or four people working at a time with a young person. CIT Vocational College student advisors have an explicit policy of being visible and available to students, and actively move around in locations where students congregate. Additional support includes tutorial support offered at lunchtimes and evenings. Focus group participants, however, also expressed the importance of gradually weaning students off support services so that they can learn to become independent in their adult lives and build their sense of personal agency. This was seen as especially important as students grow older and lose their currency in government support systems as 'young people'.

A major form of institutional support to both staff and students in the CIT Vocational College is the ongoing maintenance of reasonably low student-teacher ratios. This was seen by focus group participants as one of the most important and tangible forms of support offered by CIT, particularly when working with vulnerable learners. Though expensive, it was seen as providing better learning outcomes.

**Within the Access10 program**, students can undertake accredited courses either in other CIT Centres, or at other training providers, which can then be credited towards their Year 10 Certification. In terms of supporting student financially, since January 2009, tuition fees have been waived for students doing Access10. ACT Government Fee Assistance is also available to CIT students on a needs basis for students enrolling in courses other than Access10.

**The YARDS program** functions as a support program, primarily for students working towards achieving their Access10, though some participants may transition to other programs. Focus group participants stated that it is important for YARDS staff to be flexible and 'eclectic' because 'no one thing works' and 'every day is a different day'. Staff need to take the role of supporter rather than expert, and to be 'open to the fact that you learn from them as much as they learn from you'. This exchange results in 'respect and valuing', and is

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particularly important when working with the program's cohort of highly disengaged young people who more often than not carry burdens of trauma, health issues and family disruption. Seating arrangements are also seen as very important in reinforcing these relationships.

Student advocacy is also a feature of the YARDS program. Staff members see one of their roles as educating other CIT staff about the young people they work with, because youth workers' and teachers' views of young people can sometimes differ. YARDS workers are, according to focus group participants, succeeding in improving other CIT teachers' understanding of young people's situations. For instance, a young person cannot sit in a class and effectively do their TAFE work if they have serious family or mental health issues, are sleeping on someone's couch or have drug and alcohol issues. Support for teachers working with young people was also mentioned during the focus group. The RAP (Response Ability Pathways) training program based on Circle of Courage, a program based on Native American parenting practices, was cited as successful in its ability to transform attitudes of teachers working with young people.

## CONNECTING

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CIT Vocational College and CIT support staff are active in creating connections across the organisation. Some Vocational College staff work across CIT program areas. This breaks down silos, promotes network formation and distributes knowledge more widely; for example, some student advisors work with YARDS and some Access10 staff also teach or undertake student support work. While some focus group participants identified the potential to work more closely with local high schools than is currently the case, the CIT Vocational College does liaise closely with the Connect10 program, an alternative Year 9/10 program that has been established in three ACT Senior Secondary Colleges.

CIT student advisors broker connections across campuses for students interested in particular courses: they set up appointments, drive students if they cannot get there themselves and discuss courses with program coordinators. It is important to young students for advisors to be available and contactable: advisors' mobile phone numbers are given out to students as a matter of course. Student Advisors and course coordinators are also very well connected to other services for young people in the ACT and their role includes referring students to relevant support services according to need and assisting students to access those services.

For young vulnerable students in particular, a sense of connection and belonging is seen as very important. They were described as 'hungry' for hands-on support. CIT Vocational College staff commented on the significant success of seeing students, who previously had no success at school and who had been bullied, find a peer group for the first time. Some staff members go beyond their role description to help young people find stable life situations such as stable accommodation. The term 'holistic approach' was used in descriptions of the way staff work with young people: they have to work with all aspect of young people's lives because these aspects are interconnected.

**Access10 staff** structure their course to accommodate simultaneous development on a number of fronts: psychological, academic, skills building and learning to navigate the wider world. Teachers sit with students towards the end of the course and explore future options such as apprenticeships and TAFE courses. According to Access10 teachers, it is important to interrogate what these young people want to do, as there is a perception that sometimes young males study to be a mechanics and young women hair and beauty as a way of 'getting someone off their case', not because they are genuinely interested in these areas. Information and contact brokerage within CIT is also seen as an important ways to support students: there are a confusing range of campuses, people, roles and program areas to negotiate.

**Within the Year 12 program**, obtaining ACT Year 12 accreditation for CIT subjects is difficult and takes time and energy, but it described as paying off for students. The Year 12 program model, which includes ACT

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accreditation, helps young people identify their goals, even if the fit is not always perfect: it sets them on a path to other possibilities. For many students Year 12 is a significant rite of passage which they want to achieve. Others may just need particular subjects to access a chosen career path, for example in the defence forces.

## IDENTIFYING

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**Access10 teachers** noted that students see Year 10 as a 'grab bag' or 'something I think I need'. It can take a long time to work out if the fit is right between the person and what is being studied. These students often suffer from a sense of floundering identity, being 'between ports', particularly within the ACT secondary system, which sees students leaving high school at the end of Year 10 and entering dedicated Year 11 and 12 colleges. Those who do not complete Year 10 miss a rite of passage; they feel they have missed out on something special if they drop out and so don't take part in the associated rituals such as the year 10 Formal. The Access10 course offers the opportunity to belong somewhere again, and to develop future career paths in a less pressured environment.

**Within the Year 12 program**, staff members have identified certain critical points in the year. For instance there is a tendency for students to drop off towards the end of Term One. This has also, they note, been observed in the general secondary college system. In response to this the student Advice Team has trialled a phone call program in 2010 where all Year 12 students were contacted in Term 1 at the time the first round of assessments were due in. The aim was to offer 'just in time' support at the point when students may be contemplating giving up at the first hurdle.

## MONITORING

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**Access10 students** like the idea of freedom but are not always mature enough to deal with it. For instance, they may choose to go home instead of going to the next class. There is no monitoring of attendance at this level. A minority are very motivated though, even if they have previously failed at school. With the new legislative requirements that young people are engaged in earning or learning up to the age of 17, the CIT Vocational College is now implementing increased follow up with students who stop attending.

## LEADERSHIP

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CIT senior management were seen by the CIT Vocational College staff members we spoke with as being generally supportive of the need to create a positive and well-resourced environment for young people. There was recognition of the benefits of a VET training provider maintaining a strong commitment to access and general education, with benefits arising from linking the development of foundation skills with access to practical work skills.

## EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

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- The Access10 model has been sold to and used by a variety of other institutions including the ACT Government. It is used throughout parts of Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia and by other non-RTOs (such as the Galilee School).
- Demand for Access10 places in the CIT Vocational College has increased significantly with young people gravitating to the program
- Focus group participants noted particular success with students who had previously been unsuccessful in their education achieving their ACT Year 12 Certificate through the CIT Vocational College.

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- Success needs to be seen with a long term focus in mind according to staff members. A staff member may not feel they are getting anywhere on a daily basis with a student, but success can mean that this student comes back in the future after having dropped out, or they may move states and enrol elsewhere.
  - The measurement of success is by no means straightforward. For many students, ongoing attendance or partial completion of a certificate may be significant successes.

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## CASE STUDY 3: CHALLENGER TAFE, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Youth Access Re-engagement Program (YARP) at Challenger TAFE in southern suburban Perth is a transition program aimed at re-engaging and retaining young students up to the age of 17 who have dropped out of education. It aims to engage one-on-one with young people in order to re-ignite their interest in learning and further study.

Specifically, the YARP program aims to:

- Re-engage youth at risk into education, training and/or employment
- Establish a pathway for each student
- Enhance self-esteem, confidence and motivation and social skills
- Connect young people with local community services
- Provide competence in accredited training units

The program was first developed by South West TAFE in Warnambool Victoria in 2003. As a result of its success, the program has since been adopted by communities in Scotland, South Australia and Western Australia. Resources adopted by other localities include a published resource kit, mentoring and project staff liaison.

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### VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND QUALIFICATIONS OFFERED

YARP students are enrolled in selected units from the accredited Certificate I Introductory CGEA (Certificate in General Education for Adults). Students work on a chosen project of personal interest that aligns with a potential vocational pathway. The YARP program is more a *connector* to future educational pathways for young people than a comprehensive vocational training provider in itself. It aims to launch young people's process of reengagement in education by offering practical, achievable units of training that help young people gain fundamental life skills and credit towards future qualifications, and that are embedded in practical, personalised activities of relevance to young people. An example cited is the embedding of numeracy and literacy learning in a motorcycle shopping activity.

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### PROGRAMS, STRUCTURE AND FOCUS

The YARP program offers limited places to young people from Rockingham and Fremantle districts. According to focus group participants, these areas have long-term issues with unemployment and poverty. A maximum of 20 students are accepted per semester and there is a waiting list. Entry is rolling and flexible: as a student leaves, a new student is brought in. The program is funded by the WA Department of Education's participation programs.

YARP's target group is disengaged youth aged 15-17 who are not currently accessing education or training. Young people are referred to Challenger YARP from a range of sources including the correctional system, According to YARP information, these students typically:

- Are from a non-supportive or transient home environment
- Have experienced trauma
- Have a history of educational failure
- Have low self esteem

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- Have learning difficulties
  - Have poor social skills and exhibit challenging behaviours
  - Have low literacy and numeracy levels
  - Have possible past involvement with the justice system and/or youth agencies
  - Have poor problem solving and communication skills

YARP lecturers meet one-on-one with students in a community venue for one hour a week. Lecturers carry a laptop with wireless internet access, a stock of learning resources and a small consumables budget. Lecturers help students develop individual learning plans and develop strong personal mentoring relationship with students. The 'one-on-one' nature of this training is seen as fundamental by YARP staff, especially given the kinds of young people they work with; it may in fact be one of the few, and sometimes only, significant positive relationships students experience at this time in their lives.

A set of underlying principles inform the delivery of the YARP program. These are expressed by YARP as:

- Unconditional positive regard
- A positive, student-centred and safe learning environment
- Meaningful and individualised learning experiences
- Personal development (problem solving, decision making, taking responsibility for actions, making commitments)
- Cross-community agency collaboration

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Assessed against the evaluative framework, this case study demonstrates the following evidence against the key success factors:

## TEACHING

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The YARP program officially operates for one school term (17 weeks). However teachers sometimes re-enrol the more disadvantaged students for a subsequent term. YARP's leader has created what she calls a 'Role A and Role B' system where students can progress up by succeeding in one term and then continuing on to new studies in the second term. Teachers continuously work with students on goal setting: *what do you want in the next 5-10 years? What do you want to do this year? What are your needs? What will stop you getting those things?* Teachers then work with students to connect them with areas of the community that can address those needs.

An important element of this for YARP teachers is to dissect what is going on in students' lives in collaboration with students, and to put current circumstances back into perspective of students' goals. This gives students a sense of clarity and ownership. Relationships are built with students over time: students don't want to let teachers down, so they turn up to activities and programs. Students enjoy the fact that, to quote a focus group participant, 'I tend to put the responsibility of their success onto them'. For the more at-risk students, focus group participants stated that if more resources were available, YARP could conceivably work with them for an entire year; some of these kinds of students need to be, in focus group participants' words, 'house trained' so that they can cope with situations that are a usual part of life for others. Students like this are 'hugely traumatised and uneducated'.

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YARP's support for 15-17 year old students ends when staff members see students as being well on the way to becoming independent. Making room for new students in a 20-student program is a juggling act requiring careful judgment. For existing students, the one funded hour per week is seen as being 'a real push'; two hours would be 'highly effective'. In fact most staff members were described as spending from 90 minutes to two hours with students already. Once students turn 18, they cannot return to the YARP program, nor are they able to join other programs. Students are therefore encouraged to concurrently engage in programs such as Bridging the Gap, Connections or CGEA by correspondence before they turn 18.

The concept of the 'clean slate' was reiterated in this case study. YARP staff members don't know all details of students' histories and students have the freedom to be a 'fresh person'. The clean slate also goes the other way: of primary importance, participants stated, is the exposure of young people to a positive educational experience, often after universally negative experiences.

The pedagogical approach of YARP was stated as: to make education accessible and increase confidence along with knowledge about what students want and where they want to go, and then on how to achieve those goals. It is also seen to be about teaching resilience, because 'a lot of things in their lives can prevent them from accessing education, and it's coming from all directions. So teaching them not only how to get into education but how to stay in there and how to deal with all the other stuff that's going on in their lives so that they still get what they want.'

YARP is a 'high-cost program' compared to other programs funded by the Department of Education, but the outcomes are evident according to Department stakeholders/supporters. These participants stated that the Department can now see 'beyond the bean counting': they 'can see individualised outcomes for young people and that's been really important'. Department of Education modelling shows six to 10 times return to society from the outlay. (This research is not public yet, but was stated as being robust). YARP is seen by the WA Department of Education as unique and valuable, as stated by Department representatives present in the focus group. No other program is seen to do things in the same way.

Usually three or four students per group are referred to YARP by Correctional Services. These young people have been 'disengaged forever' – some haven't been to school since they were 10 years old; have not had any real or positive learning since Grade 7 at least. With these students YARP focuses on socialising and literacy/numeracy; some are illiterate.

In terms of staff qualities, YARP teachers need to be flexible, to take the unexpected, work with what is thrown at them and think on their feet. YARP's leader sometimes takes on the 'old aunt' role...students are threatened with 'I'm phoning (leader) if you don't...' The importance of strong leadership in a program like YARP is highlighted here. Most YARP staff members work part-time on the program (spread though out the week) but usually work full time in other TAFE areas simultaneously. This helps to provide continuity for students if they enter vocational programs or other youth programs run within Challenger. Working at YARP was described as a hard way to earn a living, involving much jumping between programs, because funding for YARP was described as unpredictable and tenuous. But staff members were seen as very dedicated and rarely resign because they are in it for the 'people rewards.'

## SUPPORTING

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The YARP program appears to have strong external support. External stakeholder representatives who were present at the focus group include Department of Education Participation Directive, Department of Corrective Services, the City of Coburn and the School for Isolated and Distance Education. All spoke enthusiastically about the program. YARP is seen as effective in improving the prospects of the 'most severe cases'. One

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participant stated that 'if they don't succeed in YARP then we start going *argh*'. Another added: 'because these are lost individuals.' Some YARP students are seen as already 'completely isolated' with another stating: 'isolation would be their biggest barrier...and their criminal records.'

A psychologist present at the focus group identified isolation and connection as important factors in regard to disengaged students in WA enrolled in distance education programs: such students tend to sit at home all day and do their schoolwork in isolation. Often there's no alternative for such students, especially if they are too young to go to TAFE (under-16s can only enrol with special exemption from the Department of Education). Some students undertake violent behaviour and are isolated because they have been formally excluded from all government schools due to behaviour such as teacher assault that may have received press publicity.

Many phone conversations were stated as taking place between YARP staff and support organisations such as the Department of Education. The Department has the role of 'overarching sort of monitoring' of all disengaged young people, with YARP providing one specific strategy to achieve this aim, and contact with local Departmental representatives appears to be frequent and positive.

In terms of support for students, the mentoring aspect of YARP was highlighted with comments such as: 'it's as much a mentoring as an education program. Those two things are of equal value and equally as precious.' Another stated that: 'part of it is just having...that one significant adult in their life who is a model of positive behaviours and healthy lifestyle to them, it's...one of our big outcomes for the program.' Sometimes parents are hesitant to let their children join YARP because the program only runs for one hour a week. Departmental staff members try to convince parents because they understand YARP's strengths; they inform parents that they can simultaneously link in with other full time programs. YARP staff do not themselves often deal with parents: they are not trained to do so and are focused on education and training needs of the student. Parents receive support from other areas. Participants in the YARP program are frequently from homes in which there is generation (systemic) unemployment, lack of education, and drug or alcohol abuse involving entire families. Often families have only one parent present or the student is in crisis or youth hostel accommodation as they have no functioning care givers.

The program was said to lack the resources needed to fully follow up with students after they leave the program, but staff members do follow up with those who are disengaged from school until end of 17<sup>th</sup> year and who leave the program.

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#### EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- A resounding sense of support and enthusiasm for YARP from the WA Department of Education and other external stakeholders present at the focus group
- Statements from focus group participants that WA Department of Education research (unpublished to date) confirms the effectiveness of the YARP program, with modeling pointing to six to 10 times return to society from the outlay
- The adoption of the YARP model by communities in Scotland, South Australia and Western Australia since its successful development by South West TAFE in Warnambool Victoria in 2003
- The sense, echoed in other case studies and reaffirmed by YARP case study participants, that measures of success for disengaged young people are frequently hard to quantify in the short term, and require careful longitudinal tracking over the long term
- Simply turning up is a major success measure for some students. This is followed up by new, evolving success measures developed as students progress, such as learning to read or write, getting a resume or getting a job.

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## CASE STUDY 4: COPPERFIELD COLLEGE, VICTORIA

Copperfield College is located in the North West metropolitan region of Melbourne. The college has three campuses - two junior campuses, one located at Kings Park and the other at Sydenham, and a senior campus at Delahey. The two junior campuses provide students with the knowledge and skills for their entry to the senior campus at Delahey.

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### VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND QUALIFICATIONS OFFERED

To improve retention and completion of Year 12 the College has adopted a strong vocational focus by offering an extensive range of vocational programs that provide credit towards the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). Qualifications offered are:

- Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)
- Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) – Foundation, Intermediate and Senior levels
- VET in Schools (VETiS) - Accredited Certificate II and III courses that contribute towards the VCE and VCAL.

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### PROGRAMS STRUCTURE AND FOCUS

The College has 445 students completing Year 11 and 12, with 290 undertaking VCE and 155 engaged in VCAL. VCAL was introduced at the College in 2004. All 155 VCAL students undertake VET subjects. Of the VCE students, 127 complete a VET subject as part of their VCE. VET qualification is completed over two years in Years 11 and 12. Two hundred and eighty-two students, comprising of 143 males and 139 females, approximately two thirds of all senior secondary students, undertake a VET subject and the number of VCE students choosing a VET subject continues to increase each year. The number of students selecting the VCAL over several years also continues to increase by 25 students every year.

Students are provided with a broad range of 18 different VET programs through a VET cluster comprising of eight secondary colleges and two TAFEs. These are offered externally on a Tuesday or Thursday. The College runs eight VET programs : Automotive, Business, Community Services, Community Recreation (Sport), Dance, Electrotechnology, Hospitality and Music . These programs are offered at the College to cluster schools. Copperfield is not an Registered Training Organisation and has a partnership arrangement with TAFEs and a private RTO who auspice the programs. Structured work placement is a requirement for all VCAL students on alternate Tuesdays or Thursdays. To avoid disruption to the VCE program, VCE students complete their work placement during the term breaks.

Students have a range of options for completing Year 12 over the two years of senior secondary schooling. These are:

- Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE); or
- Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) with curriculum for Year 12 students designed to enable students to complete a Senior VCAL; and
- VET Certificate II (pre-apprenticeship courses) and VCE VET programs (Certificate II and units from Certificate III)

VCAL and VCE students may undertake a School-Based Apprenticeship (Certificate III). There are fifteen students undertaking school-based apprenticeships at the College. Students are either enrolled in the VCE or VCAL with two distinct pathways: the VCE pathway into University, TAFE or employment, or the VCAL pathway

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into employment, apprenticeship/traineeship or further study in TAFE. All students therefore have a pathway into Year 12 and beyond.

Students have to earn a place in the VCAL program, and no students from other colleges are selected to do VCAL. A selection process exists for prospective VCAL students. This requires Year 10 students from the College's middle school campuses to complete a Careers Program which has a focus on identifying a career path and selecting a VET subject as part of their VCAL. Although more students want to do VCAL, the maximum number of students selected to do the VCAL has now been capped at 155 across Years 11 and 12. VCAL is a resource intensive program and the College's capacity to resource additional places would need to be reviewed.

The College is recognised for its strong vocational and academic programs, and there are several key success factors that have enabled the growth of its vocational programs, ranging from the initial VETiS programs, to its support and development of the VCAL, these factors are outlined below.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Assessed against the evaluative framework, this case study demonstrated the following evidence against the key success factors:

## TEACHING

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Class sizes in the VCAL are capped at 15 and students spend three days at school completing VCAL Units, as well as one day at work and one day undertaking VET. If students do not have a work placement, they go to school to work with the Work Placement Officer and the Team to actively find a placement. Finding placements for all students can be an issue. Year 11 students commence work placement by the start of Term 2. Year 12 students commence by the end of February, having completed the Occupational Health and Safety prior to commencing the placement. Weekend work counts toward their VCAL outcomes. VCAL outcomes are documented in a manual called PDM (Pen-Diary-Module) that students bring to all classes, and achieved outcomes are signed off by teachers in the PDM.

Teachers have undertaken considerable work on getting the alignment right between theory and practice across the vocational options that they offer. For example, it had been identified that VETiS programs were operating at a tertiary level while VCAL was operating at a pre-VCE level. There were many staff meetings to discuss how to bring the two programs on a path so that the students were being supported across the whole of the program, including their VET studies. VCAL teachers had to become familiar with the VET units. For this to happen TAFE and other Colleges delivering VET were asked to work together to determine the appropriate industry outcomes of the VET program.

## SUPPORTING

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VCAL classes are streamed according to VET programs for a focused integrated curriculum completed through a series of VCAL projects. Students need support in comprehension of the theory and vocational related terminology (literacy and oracy). 'VCAL literacy supports the work they have to do in their VET subject'. Students spend days at school working on VCAL projects focusing on literacy, numeracy, personal development and work related skills.

The curriculum is structured to recognise individual student needs and the College runs smaller classes compared to other colleges in the cluster. Classes are run separately for Year 11 and Year 12 students. Every effort is made to structure the program so that students are engaged and theory work is relevant to students.

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VCAL students may require literacy and numeracy support and in some classes half the class will operate with one-on-one student support by integration aides.

A dedicated Work Placement Officer helps all 155 students find work placements, completes paperwork, visit students and builds sustainable relationships with employers.

‘The visiting is really important, not just for the students but it helps us to build the network for the future’.

In addition, each campus has a speciality Careers Teacher who focuses on supporting students to manage their workload, pathways and transitions. A structured Year 10 and 11 program in Term 2 and 3 focuses on individual students’ transition into Year 11 or Year 12. Year 12 students focus on independent learning. Each student has a mentor teacher. All students have a clear pathway by Year 12.

Support for teachers includes three VCAL curriculum coordinators who assist them in the classroom with the aim of enhancing positive outcomes from their study. In addition, a dedicated Projects Officer identifies and supports project based learning, some of which includes community-based projects.

## CONNECTING

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Copperfield College works in partnership with schools and TAFE to deliver VET programs to students in what is known as the ‘Brimbank Cluster’. The VET cluster was established through the support of the Local Learning Employment Network (LLEN). Students from the college may undertake their vocational studies on campus, at TAFE or at another school in the cluster. This requires close collaboration and principals have two meetings per year to review the VET offerings and VET funding, and to set VET fees and charges across the cluster. In addition, the cluster employs a VET Cluster Coordinator to liaise with school VET Coordinators and to track and monitor student placements and attendance.

Teachers also indicated the importance of connecting with students early so that they have an understanding of what vocational programs are about prior to them making a decision about continuing with their senior secondary schooling.

I think also an important step is between Year 10 and 11, getting the Year 10s [understand] about what VCAL is - what VET is. You don’t want to lose the kids then. If you lose those kids that are 15 and 16 out on the streets, there’s a chance they’ll never find a full time job ...so it’s really critical you get to those.

The College has also made a significant commitment to ongoing improvement and to communicating with parents and families of the students. To help parents to better understand and support their child through their VCAL eight to ten information sessions are held in Term 1 each year. The scheduling of the information sessions aims to provide all parents with an opportunity to come along to one session. These sessions are run with a small group of parents. Parents meet the teachers, the Team Leaders and the Leadership Team. The sessions offer parents the opportunity to ask questions and parents are walked through the PDMs and the VET options. In the VCE parent information sessions parents are walked through the curriculum. VET is showcased through student success stories at the VCAL nights as the parents are interested in further study and employment destinations, whilst parents attending the VCE nights are more likely to be interested in scores.

The College Community Partnerships Strategic Planning Group has also developed an online survey for members of the College community (parents and families) to complete.

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## MONITORING

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VCE and VCAL students are all treated the same. They are referred to as Year 11 and Year 12 student groups and all student groups operate within the same management structures. A 'whole of school' approach to student management has been implemented, and is led by teams involving all teachers. A team leader manages 150 students and monitors behaviour, attendance, progress and attendance of their off-campus VET program.

Expectations are also placed upon students with a requirement for 90 per cent attendance. Where attendance has been an issue, follow-up on student absences has resulted in improved student attendance. Furthermore, the same procedures apply to VCE and VCAL students with regard to handing in work.

Teachers also constantly monitor the VCAL program in order to determine ways of improving teaching and learning outcomes. As part of this process, work placements are reviewed in an ongoing manner to ensure appropriate activities are incorporated into the VCAL curriculum.

We're very proud of our program. I know you can tell from our voice, but the thing is we have tried to refine it on a yearly basis because as you get better different challenges start to present themselves. So that's part of building up the program and getting the capacity of the teachers to the level where everybody is comfortable teaching the students rather than teaching the program.

## LEADERSHIP

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A 'whole of school' approach supports the College's vocational and applied learning model. The leadership team's support of vocational learning, VET and retention is absolutely explicit. However if students access a full-time apprenticeship before completing school, this is also regarded as a good outcome.

The VCAL program sits alongside the VCE . This change has involved a major culture shift by the staff of the college where all staff are required to teach in the VCAL program. It was noted that this approach:

...makes a huge difference because there can be some self-esteem issues with VCAL students if their program is to the side. I mean for us that's a symbolic change and that symbolism makes a real difference if you are trying to explain the program to parents and to the wider community because there is a lot of misinformation out there about VCAL'.

Whilst there was some initial resistance by VCE teachers teaching VCAL, all staff now acknowledge the value of VET and VCAL in achieving better student outcomes for the whole school community. There are no VCAL or VCE teacher meetings, only staff meetings involving all teachers, which focus on identifying good practice in teaching and learning being filtered across all programs whether it is VET, VCE or VCAL. Strong teachers with strong student management skills are given leadership roles and the previous demarcation between the VCAL and VCE teachers no longer exists.

Teacher leadership is supported by encouraging staff to collaborate on the provision of an integrated model that embeds literacy and numeracy and to meet in their own time beyond the formal staff meetings across all programs. There is a large professional development budget of \$75,000 to support teachers across the College.

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## EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- 100% completion data of a Senior VCAL in Year 12.
- VET is recognised by all at the College as a real measure of success enabling students to complete Year 12 or equivalent.

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- An expectation exists of 100% completion rate in the Senior VCAL with all students transitioning into further education or employment.
  - Improved student retention and completion of Year 12 or equivalent. This is clearly documented in the College's strategic plan.
  - Student achievements are showcased at parent information evenings. Students are acknowledged in the Region's Vocational Awards.

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## CASE STUDY 5: HOLMESGLEN VOCATIONAL COLLEGE, VICTORIA

Commencing in 2007, Holmesglen Vocational College operates from a Holmesglen campus in Melbourne's South East. The Vocational College offers a vocationally based education together with personal development programs. The focus of Holmesglen Vocational College is on the education and social development of young people, preparing them for further study, employment and participation in society. After they have completed their Vocational College program, the College offers pathways for students into a broad range of TAFE programs and apprenticeships.

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### VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND QUALIFICATIONS OFFERED

Programs available for students 15 to 18 years of age are:

- Certificate I in Vocational Preparation
- Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) - Foundation, Intermediate and/or Senior
- Certificate II qualifications (Pre-Apprenticeship and Certificate courses)
- Certificate III qualifications (Part-time Apprenticeship or Certificate courses)

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### PROGRAMS, STRUCTURE AND FOCUS

The Certificate I in Vocational Preparation is designed for students 15 to 18 years of age who have not completed Year 10. Students undertake the program three days per week over two terms or a semester. In 2009, Holmesglen Vocational College ran two programs with a further program to be delivered in Semester 2, 2010. On completion, students have a pathway into Certificate II courses and the Intermediate VCAL program.

Year 11 (Intermediate VCAL) involves three days in which students work on the literacy, numeracy and personal development VCAL units and two days where they undertake the industry stream of the program. In the industry stream students are required to select one vocational program for Semester 1 and a different program for Semester 2. The options available to them are building (carpentry, joinery, bricklaying, tiling, plastering, painting and plumbing); electrical and engineering; civil construction; hospitality; business; community services; sport and recreation; desktop publishing; multimedia; hairdressing and beauty therapy. Delivery of particular industry-specific streams is dependent upon minimum group sizes. All streams are offered on various campuses of Holmesglen except for hairdressing and beauty therapy which are delivered by a private training provider. Practical placements for the work related units must be completed in Semesters 1 and 2. These placements consist of a two-week block at the end of each semester.

The overall aim of the Intermediate VCAL program is to give students the opportunity to experience and gain an understanding of various industry-based programs so that they might make well-informed decisions about further studies or career choices. Students take a full year (two semesters) to complete the qualification. Approximately 50 per cent of students completing Intermediate VCAL through the Vocational College return to undertake a Senior VCAL.

The prerequisite for Year 12 (Senior VCAL) is successful completion of Intermediate VCAL or Year II. The aim of this two semester program is to develop work related and industry specific skills and provide students with a clear pathway into employment or further study. It entails a day of academic work and four days of industry programs together with work. Part-time employment is possible within the industry programs in any of the following: Carpentry or Electrical Pre-Apprenticeship program; or Certificate III in Tourism and Event Management; Certificate III in Information Technology; Certificate III in Fitness.

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Of the 200 students enrolled in the Vocational College at the time of this study, 120 were undertaking Year 11 studies and 80 were undertaking Year 12. Students choosing to do the VCAL at the Vocational College generally have a strong interest in particular industries or trades and prefer a applied approach within a more flexible and an adult learning environment than that offered by the traditional school environment.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Assessed against the evaluative framework, this case study demonstrated the following evidence against the key success factors:

### INFORMING

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To access programs, students undergo a comprehensive selection process which involves the completion of an Expression of Interest Form designed in the first instance to ascertain information on previous education and any employment or work experience. Prospective Foundation and Intermediate VCAL students are also required to provide information on their particular industry interests by listing and ranking a maximum of eight programs from an extensive list together with their top six personal development options. Prospective Senior VCAL students select an industry stream from a list of eight.

Students attend an interview at which they furnish their last school report. This is followed by a pre-enrolment online assessment of their literacy and numeracy. After enrolment, students undergo a four-day induction program covering an introduction to the Vocational College, First Aid and Construction Induction Card (required before entering any construction site it enables students to work safely in the construction industry), Campus and Industry Teaching Departments. Clear guidance is also provided at this time on the workplace standards required including the appropriate use of mobile phones and electronic equipment; respect for people and property which addresses issues of bullying, swearing, damage or graffiti; and condition of entry in classrooms without classroom equipment or personal protective equipment (PPE).

### TEACHING

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Classes for VCAL are capped at 15 students. All Senior VCAL students have an individualised program that is designed to accommodate their full-time study and part-time work. The Individualised Learning Plan for a student can be accessed by all teachers so that anyone can deal with an issue as it arises. The program is also very flexible allowing a range of options for students. For example, students may enrol in the program at the Vocational College whilst still completing a program they started at school.

A number of teachers provide literacy and numeracy support to students with extra time in the class that includes both individual and group work. Software is available to assist in the development of reading and writing. The teaching approach is very practical and hands-on and teachers are constantly reviewing their teaching approach and the learning projects that they employ. A project based approach is adopted to enhance literacy and numeracy skills and projects have been formulated around such issues as sustainable housing, running a business, nutrition issues and gambling. Another has been developed, the SYN FM project where students put a radio show to air.

It was acknowledged that getting the right teachers to teach on the program is critically important. It is challenging to teach a younger cohort of students, particularly those with learning difficulties. Teachers are able to access professional development to assist them in building the skills to teach young people and counsellors are also available to assist in this area.

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## MONITORING AND SUPPORTING

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The guidance provided to students is tailored to suit individual needs. Each student is assigned a mentor who is responsible for the student's Individual Learning Plan (ILP). The role of the mentor is to welcome the student and maintain a welcoming and friendly environment, monitor student engagement and attendance and report on student progress to the Program Coordinator. The mentor is also required to communicate/liaise with other teachers and industry trainers and to provide them with support in order to ensure successful program completion.

In addition, the mentor interviews each student individually and formally at the end of Term 1, 2 and 4 using a template that is set out in the ILP; makes initial contact with reports both informally and formally to parents via telephone and at student/parent/teacher nights at the end of terms 1 and 3. This process also includes an element of career planning. Where necessary, the mentor refers students to welfare or career counsellors. And finally, the mentor completes a formal mentor report which sets out the student's career and employment goals.

Apart from the teaching staff, the program is supported by two counsellors, program coordinators (one of whom is a literacy/numeracy teacher) and an Industry (Pathways) and Work Skills Coordinator. A full time welfare and careers counsellor spends half of her time on individual student counselling and the remainder in the classroom delivering a range of programs on careers and in meeting personal development outcomes which include: personal financial literacy, body image, bullying, eating disorders, and managing stress.

Literacy and numeracy and Work Related and Personal Development Skills teachers deal with student issues as they arise. Student behaviour and discipline issues are dealt with in a formal way, reflecting workplace processes and standards. A coordinator maintains a database on attendance and when a problem arises it is referred to the mentor who follows-up with the student and parents. A two-strike policy is in place, with the mentor meeting with parents on the first strike. The Program Manager deals with behaviour contracts and the mentor follows up on a weekly basis. Attendance is much improved because students know exactly what is expected of them. The suggestion is that attendance is 'much better than secondary school'.

Additional support is provided through the twice a week Student Breakfast Club facilitated by the Hospitality Department and a counsellor.

## CONNECTING

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The strength of the programs offered by the Vocational College was best described by focus group participants as giving 'students and opportunity to try a variety of industries that they can't do when they, for example, enrol in VCAL through school'. More importantly, they have a clear pathway into Holmesglen's mainstream programs and this pathway is negotiated by teachers who have that responsibility. As one teacher explained:

We've got a lot of departments here at Holmesglen and before they start off each year, it is my job to go and investigate what opportunities our students can have with a variety of departments. It gives them an opportunity to have a pathway if they finish and want to continue, it's not compulsory to stay on with us.

The practical placement coordinator makes workplace visits on weekends, and evenings and maintains telephone contact with the student and the employer. There is also a strong careers program through which students explore careers and identify possible courses that they might undertake after their VCAL program. In Term 3, students are linked with employment agencies, apprenticeship centres and group training companies so that they understand what their options and opportunities are.

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Connecting with parents and external agencies is also seen to be critical as:

For a lot of parents, they still don't know what VCAL is about because it is still...relatively new and schools talk about VCE but they really don't talk about VCAL. So parents or support agencies sometimes are at a bit of a loss until they've actually had some experience with it.

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#### EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- 50 per cent of students who complete Intermediate VCAL transition into a Senior VCAL and 45 per cent transition into further study or employment.
- Senior VCAL students transition into further study or employment via apprenticeships and traineeships
- There has been a continuing increase in retention of Year 11 (Intermediate VCAL) to Year 12 (Senior VCAL)
- There are clear pathways into mainstream programs in the TAFE College
- Very good participation rates with a strong record of retention and completion. Very few students struggle and this is an outcome of the work skills program where students find their own work placement; core projects which focus on literacy, numeracy and work skills and students are prepared for employment through a mock interview with employers.
- Student achievements are showcased at parent information evenings. Vocational College Awards night in Term 2 showcases the work of approximately 25 students, four of these go on to the TAFE College Awards.
- The Vocational College commenced in 2007 with 150 students and enrolments have continued to increase each year. In 2010 there are 250 students enrolled in the Holmesglen Vocational College.

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## CASE STUDY 6: TAFENSW – NORTH COAST INSTITUTE

Since 2004 the North Coast Institute (NCI) has had a steady increase in young people enrolling in vocational programs and in 2009, almost 30 per cent of the Institute's 43,294 enrolments were aged between 15 and 19 years of age. A further 3 per cent of enrolments were aged 14 years or less. Significantly 11 per cent of the population of the North Coast region of New Wales is Aboriginal and within that population somewhere between 40 and 50 per cent are young people aged between 5 and 24 years of age (ABS 2007, cited in Harding 2009, p.7). As a consequence, NCI places great emphasis on the delivery of targeted programs for young people and young Aboriginal people in particular.

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### VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND QUALIFICATIONS OFFERED

The Institute offers a full range of school-based traineeships and apprenticeships; NSW Board of Studies developed courses across the full spectrum of industry areas all of which are ATAR eligible; a selection of Board endorsed courses which have no ATAR eligibility; and special programs such as CareerLink and Fast Track. It also offers innovative programs specifically designed to engage, retain and transition young people. These programs are:

- V Tracks
- Skills Pathways for Youth (SPY)

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### PROGRAMS, STRUCTURE AND FOCUS: V TRACKS

V Tracks is an early intervention program for Aboriginal students in Years 8 to Year 10. It is designed to increase engagement and retention in education and transition to further study and employment of these students. 'Through a focus on TAFE taster programs and school-based vocational learning in the earlier years of schooling, V Tracks provides young Aboriginal learners with opportunities to taste, think about, choose and plan school and vocational pathways whilst exploring individual, workplace, educational and Aboriginal cultural values' (Harding 2009, p.35).

Harding (2009) notes V Tracks programs are designed to include learning activities which develop employment, study and communication skills, workplace readiness, cultural awareness and enhanced confidence and self esteem, through opportunities to:

- explore and experience different vocational areas
- identify transition pathways into further education, employment and training
- design, implement and evaluate 'hands on' vocational learning projects, adding to or complementing existing school programs and activities
- identify opportunities to work with mentors, case managers, school tutors, Aboriginal Education Workers and community members
- experience cross-cultural orientation of programs through more equal and diverse learning contexts and strategies, including engagement and interaction with Aboriginal role models and traditional and contemporary Aboriginal culture
- prepare for and /or engage in work placement.

The V Tracks program was described by one focus group participant as 'non-confrontational, friendly, look/see experiential hands-on learning where they [students] get to choose and have multiple choices or tastes of different courses, where they can...be here in a very large group of their peers, with lots of support around. It's meant to be an environment, from my perspective, that is fun and engaging'. The approach is a layered one

which allows students to try different things and to build on their experiences to the point where they can narrow their focus to particular vocational areas that they want to study. This strategy provides students with the opportunity to develop relationships in Year 8 with each other and with the teachers and these continue in Years 9, 10 and beyond. Students can express interest in up to eight preferred areas of study and they may get the opportunity to taste approximately four or more of these areas. Programs are determined on the numbers interested in each area - that is, young people themselves determine the industry areas included in the program, rather than the TAFE coordinators on their own. Described below, the tasters in Stage 1 of V Tracks are mostly non-accredited and non-assessed, however in subsequent stages teachers are encouraged to identify accredited Certificate II units and where possible students are enrolled. This offers students with the opportunity for credit transfer beyond the V Tracks program.

Structurally the programs are conducted in three stages:

Stage 1	TAFE-based Taster and can include units from any course offered by NCI	Years 8 to 10 students
Stage 2	TAFE and school-based learning: includes accredited CI and CII units from the <i>Statement of Attainment in Access to Work and Training</i> or Certificate II TVET courses	Mostly Years 9 and 10 students
Stage 3	Work-based learning and/or Work readiness	Mostly Year 10 students

#### PROGRAMS, STRUCTURE AND FOCUS: SKILLS PATHWAYS FOR YOUTH (SPY)

These programs are designed specifically for young people returning to Year 11 as a result of the raising of the school leaving age in New South Wales. Counting as four or six units towards the NSW Preliminary year, SPY programs offer the opportunity to gain a Certificate II qualification for those students not intending to gain an ATAR.

To undertake a SPY course, students are required to be enrolled in Year 11 in school, have completed an Expression of Interest and be nominated through their school. Subject to viable student numbers, these new programs are being offered across a number of NCI campuses in construction, plumbing, retail, automotive, hospitality and horticulture all of which articulate into higher level qualifications. Students attend up to two days per week and can do a combination of SPY and TVET at the discretion of the school. SPY courses are similar to TVET with regard to content and focus, but are delivered over one year rather than two, thus fast-tracking students through the qualification. 'In the absence of a lot of pre-apprenticeship courses for that age group, it is a way of enabling a student to enrol with us and spend a day a week in TAFE' (VET for Schools Coordinator).

Many of the students are doing Workplace Communications which is from the Certificate II in Skills for Work and Training. In a significant shift from the traditional HSC, students are undertaking these Certificate II programs in combination with Workplace Communications and 'hopefully they will be really ready for taking up an apprenticeship or employment' (VET for Schools Coordinator).

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Assessed against the evaluative framework, this case study demonstrated the following evidence against the key success factors:

### TEACHING

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In the broad range of programs offered for school students in NCI, an emphasis has been placed on flexibility and responsiveness to the particular needs of the learners and their schools. For example, TVET programs are generally offered in afternoon timeslots recognising the difficulty of students getting away from school. Classes are conducted between 1.30 and 5.30 on some campuses, between 2.00 and 6.00 on others and in some instances run 6.00 to 9.00 pm. In another delivery model, Fast Track<sup>2</sup> programs like Construction and Business Services are run over a whole day doubling the amount of learning that can be achieved in the one year. The SPY programs are also an outcome of NCI seeking to open up opportunities for young people who are not following the traditional HSC pathway. V Tracks programs are designed in close collaboration with school coordinators so that young Aboriginal students can participate in ways that complement rather than conflict with their school programs and timetable – for example on quieter days or weeks of the school term.

Another strategy is Summer School. Students in Summer Schools complete 120 hours of study in their TVET course over the December-January term break. This enables students to meet Board requirements for 2 units which can then contribute to the student's HSC study. Designed for those students that want to return to Year 12 and focus on HSC, Summer Schools occur in a period of time when there is less pressure on them and they are able to obtain a Certificate III at the same time.

As the Institute services an extensive region, teachers are also taking TVET and V Tracks programs to isolated schools where students are unable to access TAFE campuses – some travelling considerable distances to do so. Generally delivered in blocks, class times and locations are negotiated to suit the particular school and student needs. In many instances, student numbers are small. For example, one teacher described a situation where she was teaching units in a Certificate III in Health Service Assistance to Year 11 with two students in the class doing a Certificate II in Aged Care Work.

### CONNECTING AND SUPPORTING

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The Institute has a whole-of-organisation approach to connecting, communicating and collaborating with key stakeholders. North Coast Aboriginal Learning Partnerships (NCALP)<sup>3</sup>, for example plays a major linking role in NCI's programs. The NCALP team brokers and leads Aboriginal education and helps to drive the essential collaboration between the TAFE, school, community and industry partners required to develop programs that achieve improved educational and employment outcomes for Aboriginal students.

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<sup>2</sup> Fast Track courses are a two year package of study in which students can complete 4 units of study in Year 11 and then complete additional of extension units of study in their HSC Year. They are seen to maximise credit transfer into further vocational qualifications.

<sup>3</sup> NCALP is an approach to Aboriginal education and employment that overtly values partnerships as a way of working and expects a whole-of-business commitment to improving outcomes. It is a business initiative of North Coast TAFE and includes a coordination team to assist the institute to achieve it its *2020 Vision* to diversify Aboriginal participation, deepen partnerships with industry and community organisations, develop pathways between sectors and drive performance within the institute.

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With the V Tracks program, the teachers and support staff see that they play a significant role in highlighting the possibility of pathways to other vocational programs and are therefore making TAFE and VET visible and accessible not only to students, but also to school principals, school teachers, careers advisors and parents. Significantly, V Tracks is an outcome of a much larger collaboration between TAFE, schools, government agencies, local councils, Local Community Partnerships, business and industry and the broader Aboriginal community and agencies. As evidence of this, Stage 1 of V Tracks starts with an Open Day on NCI campuses for Years 8 to 10 students where in a mix of educational, social and cultural activities they meet teachers and support staff, are shown vocational learning opportunities at TAFE and school and discuss possible education, training and employment pathways.

Support is maintained throughout the program and it was suggested that 'some of them [students] do need a lot of support because they're not getting very much outside and to actually think that they can come here and there are people who are willing to listen, and to offer maybe practical solutions to some of the problems they are in'. Just how important support is in the successful progression and transition for some students was further exemplified by one teacher who commented:

... I have a Year 10 Indigenous student enrolled in a Year 11 TVET Certificate 3 and she came through the V Tracks program in Year 9 last year. She was introduced to our section. They had choices to go to a different section. She repeated and came back to our section. She is very focused – she wants a career in health or nursing and she wants to be a midwife and she's very, very clear on what she wants. [She] is a little bit more immature than the other students, granted, and found the whole experience of returning into a Year 11 class when she is in Year 10 harrowing, absolutely harrowing for her in the first hour or two, because she felt she was out of her depth. She felt that she was the only one there that was in Year 10, she was special, she was different to everybody else and she wanted to leave. It just took a little bit of one on one time and a little bit of you know debriefing her and getting her engaged with the group and now she is attending now and succeeding in the a certificate (Head teacher, Nursing).

Connecting students with other students is also an active strategy designed to promote ongoing participation. Strong peer relationships are encouraged in recognition of the role that friendship groupings and geography can play on attrition. When one student from one school or friendship group drops out, others will follow. In the V Tracks programs, however, students 'are not isolated - they are coming on buses with their friends, with their mates, with people they know. There are teachers [both school and TAFE teachers] and Aboriginal coordinators that they know and I think they feel that it is a very safe place to be...I think it is a very beneficial thing for students at this age'. In the same process, strong relationships are also developed with teachers, Careers Advisors, Aboriginal Education Officers and those supporting the young people undertaking these programs.

Linkages with local industry have strengthened as a result of considerable growth in school-based traineeships and apprenticeships as well as TVET programs, which require one week per year of work placement. Working closely with industry is seen as a constant relationship building exercise that is a major role for all Institute staff. The success of efforts is evidenced in industry's active involvement in the programs for young people.

We will consult with industry as to what units they want in these qualifications where there's room for choice and they have very strong ideas usually as to what they do want people to have. Then in this local area they are far exceeding the requirements for workplace learning. We have a requirement of 8 hours minimum and 50 hours desirable, our students achieve 100 to 120 hours of workplace exposure and we've had particular workshops run by industry within our campus grounds here for the past two Mondays.

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Industry has delivered it, so industry comes in and feeds into the courses for delivery to it (Head Teacher).

## INFORMING

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NCI targets a good deal of promotional material at young people, providing pamphlets which have headings such as *Young people at TAFE NSW...* and *Information for: Young people who would like to leave school before the end of Year 10*. They also provide a list of campus contacts that are specifically for young people. A comprehensive vocational education and training course guide for school students is also disseminated on an annual basis.

With the change of school leaving age in 2010, promotional material advises young people to stay at school to complete Year 10, but also encourages students to consider studying a TAFE course at school either as a taster, a short course or a TVET program in combination with HSC.

Another strategy for informing potential students of what VET can offer are the *Deadly Days Festivals*. Organised by the North Coast Institute's North Coast Aboriginal Learning Partnership team, these federally-funded activities are conducted on a number of campuses each year with the goal of increasing young Aboriginal people's participation in education, training and employment. Activities leading up to the main festival day includes practical workshops for school students in which they get a taste of TAFE and VET and potentially a statement of attainment to set them on their way if they chose to take that pathway. As significant numbers of students and parents attend, these festivals are seen to raise the status of vocational education within the wider Aboriginal communities.

The parents are actually invited to come and participate in the courses on the day so they can do the stuff with their kids and get a feel for themselves what their kids are actually learning and I guess understand the value of their kids having those experiences and being able to support them if that's what they want to do in the future (Project Officer, NCALP).

In a climate of growth of TVET enrolments and programs like SPY and V tracks, NCI has developed a *Youth Transition Kit* to inform improved transitions from school to TAFE, and is used specifically for early school leavers seeking to undertake Year 10 equivalent study with NCI. The use of the kit involves a young person being supported by both TAFE and the school in a case-managed and personalised way to develop a personal education and employment plan. Requiring sign-off by the school Principal, parent, TAFE Director/Manager and young person, the process involves:

...going through and talking about aspirations and interests and vocational needs, looking at literacy and numeracy current skill level and what kind of support will be needed [and] a whole heap of things like history of violence and disability support and all of those things. But then some very clear career mapping and goal mapping. And then the customised program [is developed]. So we have young people who might be co-enrolled in a vocational certificate 2 qualification but they're at the same time enrolled in a general educational qualification for the literacy, numeracy, employability and communication skills. With this tool, head teachers and teachers are being supported to identify and manage young people in transition.

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## EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- In 2008, nine V Tracks programs were delivered across 40 North Coast Schools and 14 TAFE campuses including more than 700 students in Stage 1 and 500 students in Stage 2

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- In a study undertaken by Harding (2009, p.15) feedback from students who engaged in the V Tracks programs indicates students were better informed, more self-confident, had a greater understanding of employment and study options and many were encouraged to stay on at school as an outcome of the program.
  - Whilst only in its early stages, the take-up of SPY courses by schools and students is encouraging with sufficient numbers to conduct programs in Workplace Communications, automotive and retail. However, in the future offering similar arrangements via fastracking students through TVET programs may be a more likely option. Interestingly the SPY concept has been favoured by schools and as schools move to offering more of their timetable to potential TVET delivery, it is suggested that fastracking may become more common.

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## CASE STUDY 7: OAKEY STATE HIGH SCHOOL, QUEENSLAND

Oakey State High School is located in Oakey, a rural centre of around 3,600 people located 29 kilometres west of Toowoomba in the Darling Downs region of southern Queensland. Primarily an agricultural district with an emphasis on meat and cropping, Oakey is close to nearby coal mining operations.

The school has been running vocational programs since the early 1990s and now runs specialist programs focused on making students 'work ready'. These programs began as a targeted attempt to engender change in students' attitude towards work and include school based traineeships and apprenticeships. An estimated 80% - 90% of senior students are undertaking vocational programs, amounting to 50%-60% of the school in general. Oakey's vocational programs attract young people from the local district who are not academically inclined, not engaged in traditional schooling, and are looking for practical options to gain work skills and make a living. Its full-day work-based school days have been cited in focus groups as an important reason for the school's success in retaining students and engaging local industry. Through this program students get to experience the reality of work, such as the early starts and all-weather conditions typical of the construction industry, and to decide if this career is really for them.

External forces have also played their part to shape Oakey's vocational programs. As in other states, a contributing factor has been state legislation requiring young people to be engaged in education, training or work, currently in Queensland up to the end of their 16<sup>th</sup> year. Others include the changing nature of the points scheme that allows students to undertake study towards their QCE (Queensland Certificate of Education), and state government strategies to reduce perceived skills shortages in some industries. This includes support of Construction Skills Queensland to employ a regional industry mentor, who actively works with Oakey students on construction placements.

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### VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND QUALIFICATIONS OFFERED

Oakey State High School offers school-based traineeships and apprenticeships interwoven with Certificate I and II qualifications. Specialist teaching areas include Business, Hospitality, Engineering, Furnishing, IT and Construction. Certificate courses attract points towards the Queensland Certificate of Education; the number of points varies from course to course. Some Certificate courses are offered in combination; for instance, one option for students is to undertake a Certificate I in Business and another in IT in Year 10, then continue with Certificate II courses in IT and Business in the following years, eventually gaining two Certificate I and two Certificate II qualifications by the end of Year 12. Certificate II options also include OP (Overall Position) pathways into university study, which a minority of students take up.

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### PROGRAMS, STRUCTURE AND FOCUS

The primary model adopted by Oakey State High School in its vocational programs is the 'whole day' approach. Currently students can enrol in engineering, construction or furnishing traineeships and apprenticeships. They spend every Wednesday or Thursday 'on the job' in a real workplace, complete with realistic work conditions. Groups are commonly from eight to 10 students in size, and programs run over two years. Other areas of study, such as hospitality and business, offer a simulated workplace within school grounds. Once graduating, the aim is for students to transition into local community workplaces via established partnerships and networks. Literacy and numeracy development is delivered at the school on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays. All students can choose from vocational or academic streams, and combinations are also offered.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Assessed against the evaluative framework, this case study demonstrated the following evidence against the key success factors:

### TEACHING

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Oakey State High School's vocational programs focus on practical activities aligned to real workplace conditions, with the aim of producing students who are 'work ready'. In the rural context of Oakey, pathways to practical careers are seen as more important to the future of non-academically inclined students than qualifications for their own sake.

Central to the development of these skills are full days of work-based training. Such days allow students to gain sustained first-hand experience of the workplace, to make informed choices about their future careers, and to gain a sense of personal agency, responsibility, perseverance and control. Oakey SHS staff members stated that employability skills like these are highly valued by local industry. The all-day approach is also seen by staff as superior to lesson-based delivery, where the chopping and changing of subjects is seen to lead to distraction, low productivity and opportunities to coast, particularly in the case of the boys, whose changes in attitude and achievement have apparently been marked. Parents are seen as important stakeholders in the education process, and the all day approach has been described as generating buy-in from parents, many of whom have witnessed the personal development of their children. The 'one day a week' formula for the all day program arose out of a process of trial and error; it was previously found that too many days 'on the job' resulted in students leaving school altogether.

Some areas of the vocational program (such as Business) offer elective subjects. Students' ability to specialise in their study focus has resulted in increased levels of engagement, but this creates extra workloads for teachers. In regard to Oakey's school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, two significant motivating factors for students are that they are paid, and that they can move into a career path whilst still at school, therefore avoiding having to compete with other graduates once leaving school.

The school runs a number of recognition and award programs: a six-monthly safety participation award program with a simple ceremony and prizes including hand tools; incentive lunches where parents are invited; end of year awards; and the publishing of students who gain certification in school newsletters. Competition between students, in terms of recognition and awards, is seen as a healthy motivator to achievement, especially amongst the boys. The sense of success and achievement is seen as paramount for student retention, more important in fact than the particular skill area itself. This sense of achievement is seen by staff as an accumulative process occurring over weeks, months and years.

### SUPPORTING

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Oakey SHS's vocational program is underpinned by a combination of internal and external support systems. The school has invested in this area through the Vocational Projects Officer, whom the school employs to engage with the community, build partnerships and relationships, and facilitate transition by students into vocational training. This role, which is seen as crucial by other staff members, includes organising work placements and processing VET data. It was created as a result of the significant increased administrative workload resulting from the school's vocational programs and is paid for by the existing school budget without additional funding.

A construction industry mentor is financed by Construction Skills Queensland, whose training fund is financed by the allocation of a percentage of Queensland's larger construction project budgets. This mentor interviews

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students for construction industry roles, organises placements, visits and counsels students at their one-day-a-week workplace and keeps teachers up to date on latest industry developments. This is seen as a valuable role by teachers and students; students confide in the mentor because he is not one of the teaching staff and so is seen as objective. The mentor, who currently works with two local schools, also ensures that, during Oakey SHS students' fortnight of construction workplace activity, they get a 'taster' of a particular role, which allows them to decide if a particular role is right for them.

Busy at Work and Mission Australia, funded by the Australian Government, provide not-for-profit employment and apprenticeship services. These organisations provide apprenticeship brokering services to Oakey students and staff as well as employers, and administer the paperwork involved in claiming Government incentives for employers.

## CONNECTING

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A feature of Oakey SHS's vocational program is what staff call its 'shopfront mentality'; staff actively advertise in newsletters, communicate with students through events, awards and newsletters and actively develop relationships with local community organisations. The school organises career education sessions from Years 8 to 12 which involve hosting visiting speakers from local industry. An example is the local abattoirs, a major local employer, whose speakers communicate the range of career paths available within the meat industry. Onsite student restaurants cater for teachers and parents, and students also undertake hospitality work at community events and functions.

The small size and closeness of the local community is seen by Oakey staff as a benefit. Teachers understand the contexts of students' lives because they know their families. Many students and teachers develop relationships that extend over many years. According to staff, local employers sometimes see students from smaller communities as harder working and possessing a greater degree of personal initiative than students from larger regional centres.

When delivering vocational activities, Oakey SHS staff members frequently create small student teams. Students negotiate their level of responsibility within a team and less confident members are encouraged to 'move up' the line as they grow in experience and confidence. Teachers commented in our focus group that Oakey students are generally very supportive of peers with disabilities and other difficulties.

## INFORMING

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Prior to undertaking vocational programs at Oakey SHS, students undertake a formal interview process. Throughout their time at Oakey, students are offered choice in their vocational activities and are provided with ongoing feedback about their work performance and aims.

## IDENTIFYING

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Oakey's current vocational programs are a deliberate intervention designed to engender attitudinal change within students who 'weren't really interested in doing any work and therefore we had to change the way we were doing things'. This change has also involved engendering attitudinal changes in staff. Teachers are made aware that they are not the sole provider of information for students, but part of a mix including teachers, students, mentors, industry and the work environment itself.

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The school recognises that some rural young people have highly developed skills in some areas connected with their framing home lives. Recognition of Prior Learning processes allow for the formal recognition of such skills.

## MONITORING

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For Oakey students, the balance between work activities and study at Oakey is sometimes hard to achieve. It is monitored carefully by the school. The all-day placements make it much easier to monitor students' progress, as opposed to 70 minute lessons where students can 'sneak away'.

## LEADERSHIP

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Key to the vocational program's success is the engendering of flexibility through the entire program operations. This involves some 'bending of the rules' by necessity, and a willingness to 'stick your neck out' - and has led to criticism at times of the school leadership by both education bureaucrats and the school community. It also means that some official result measurements (such as the number of Queensland Certificates of Education achieved) are not reflective of actual achievement in terms of actual student agency and career direction.

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## EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- Placement of 18 Construction apprentices by industry mentor across two schools including Oakey
- Awards won by the school and its staff include:
  1. 2009 and 2010 Australia Day Achievement Awards
  2. the Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) Inspirational Teaching Awards 2008
  3. the 2007 Showcase Awards: Transport and Logistics Gateway Schools Project
  4. the 2006 Transport and Logistics Achievement of the Year Award ( S. E Pike Trophy)

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## CASE STUDY 8: PADBURY SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Situated in Perth's north-western metropolitan corridor, the Flexible Learning Centre (FLC) at Padbury Senior High School offers alternative, vocationally-oriented programs for students from surrounding areas, including some of the district's most disadvantaged young people. The FLC currently caters for 64 Year 11 and Year 12 students: approximately a third of total upper school numbers. The FLC is separate to Padbury SHS's mainstream Year 11 and 12 programs and is run differently through its use of all-day programs managed by one teacher.

The Flexible Learning Centre began in 2006 to become one of the now 11 Senior School Engagement Programs (SSEP) in the area. Eighty SSEPs now run across WA schools, with 11 in the local district - 10 in public schools and one at a private school. Models differ from location to location, with some only delivering Year 11 programs. The name *Flexible Learning Centre* was purposefully chosen so that students and staff realised it was different to the mainstream and offered flexible study arrangements.

The FLC cohort varies. An estimated half "don't want to be at school" and the other half "know what they're there for". The latter includes some girls who want to be hairdressers and boys who want to be mechanics. These students are motivated and undertake two days a week of FLC pre-apprenticeship training. A few students transfer from Padbury's mainstream program to the FLC because the delivery model suits them better. According to focus group participants, many of the boys undertaking FLC study (and particularly the Year 12 boys) do not have stable male role models. Some students suffer from mental disorders (examples cited include agoraphobia and schizophrenia) and some come from disruptive home environments. However, the FLC program is not labelled as a program for disengaged young people because this may stigmatise the program and its students. Staff members believe that the cohort is "world-wise but less mature", have lived at home for longer than previous generations and have not developed practical life skills such as the ability to change a fuse in a switchbox. Staff members believe this is connected to the WA raised school leaving policy implemented over recent years.

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### VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND QUALIFICATIONS OFFERED

The Flexible Learning Centre offers a combination of school subjects (English, Mathematics, an endorsed program of Life Skills and Work Place Learning) and nationally accredited Certificate level courses delivered in the school through an auspicing arrangement with a private provider, National Corporate Training. Padbury SHS is not a Registered Training Organisation. Year 11 students undertake integrated Certificate I studies. Year 12s undertake the Certificate II in Business and have the option of undertaking additional Certificate courses in areas such as Carpentry, Automotive and Hairdressing through their TAFE placements. The Business Certificates are integrated within the Work Place Learning subject. Year 12 students studying Food Science, also have the option of undertaking the Certificate II in Hospitality within Padbury SHS's mainstream school program. If students stay in the FLC program for two years, they can leave with the WACE (Western Australian Certificate of Education).

The Life Skills programs incorporate a number of specialist courses delivered at The Flexible Learning Centre by external providers. These courses include senior first aid, pre-driver training, the HIA Blue Card Safety Awareness Training and Responsible Service of Alcohol training. General areas of study include fitness, the impact of drug and alcohol use, healthy mind, stress reduction, anger management, resilience and integrity.

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## PROGRAMS, STRUCTURE AND FOCUS

The Flexible Learning Centre offers a mix of school education, vocational training and workplace learning, delivered in a self-paced, personalised manner that includes individual timetables and study plans. FLC teachers only teach in the Centre, and students have one core teacher who coordinates their activities. The FLC aims for a maximum of 15 students per class; currently the two Year 11 classes have 18, and the two year 12 classes have 13. Although taught separately, FLC students are treated similarly to other Padbury students; they attend the school ball, assemblies and other events. This is seen to reduce the potential for the FLC and its students to be stigmatised.

FLC courses incorporate VET Certificate I and II courses, school-based traineeships and apprenticeships and School Apprenticeship Link (SAL) programs. All delivery is focused on practical or career outcomes; for instance, Maths uses practical examples such as tiling, painting or laying wallpaper to teach space and measurement concepts and English deploys resume writing, application form creation and interview skills. Workplace learning occurs on one or two days per week. A process exists for referring students out of the FLC program if a student is deemed as no longer suited to the program.

The flexibility of the program has been made possible because the WA Curriculum Council allows school teaching to be directed towards students' strengths; the Council's 'marking keys' or guidelines can be applied across subjects as long as there is no 'double dipping' of hours. The WA system does not require external examinations for what they deem 'Stage 1' studies, which covers the FLC program. Teachers negotiate subject deadlines with students on an individual basis. Students still need to meet Padbury SHS's mid-year and end-of-year assessment schedules, but other aspects of delivery are open to negotiation depending on students' interests and circumstances.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Assessed against the evaluative framework, this case study demonstrated the following evidence against the key success factors:

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### TEACHING

The FLC environment revolves around a core of individual study led by one teacher, with specialist study undertaken with other teachers for Year 12 students. All FLC students study at school for three days a week and go to TAFE or the workplace for the remaining two days. Year 11 students are based in one home classroom; this is like 'a primary school for big kids' in the words of a focus group participant. Year 11 students undertake all school subjects with one teacher. Year 12 students do the same but can also study within the school's mainstream program (Music, Higher Maths, Drama, Dance, etc). The basic structure is the same, however. Focus group participants commented that this structure works with both Year 11s and Year 12s, but is more effective with Year 11s because they do not come and go as much as the Year 12s.

Four subjects are taught during the day; these are task-driven and often involve small projects. Within reason, students can choose the subject they would like to do on any particular day. Of importance is the awareness of teachers of students' particular issues. If a student has a personal issue and cannot cope with Maths (which is hard for some students) on a particular day, they can work on English for the day instead. One focus group participant stated that: 'they may come to school with an issue, and we're aware of that. So if they muck up in the morning, I might say: I understand that. I've given you half an hour to chill out, but that's it.' Included in this is a recognition that some students may not be eating properly at home, which can affect their

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concentration. A group does come in to serve breakfast once a week, but many students do not come in early enough to take advantage of this.

One of the main strengths for students was the FLC's focus on 'tasters'; students can try out future career and study options at an time when they otherwise have to make decisions midway through Year 10, but are not old enough to make an informed decision. Many FLC students question the relevance of their studies. This contribution was strongly seconded by the focus group, which stated that FLC students tend to question how their studies are going to help them, whereas mainstream students tend to do what they are told.

Participants also commented that the single teacher arrangement helps learning. To paraphrase a group of participant comments: *In the mainstream program, students would have walked into class, spent ten minutes settling down, worked for ten minutes - and even then with little focus from the teacher - then mucked around for the rest of the class. With us there's no ducking, nowhere to hide, no bells. Plus the same students often disrupt the others continuously in every class.* Additionally, the low ratio of teachers to students was seen as an important success factor: 'I would say the ratio of teachers to students is probably the single most effective thing that we do'.

To help them stay settled, FLC students are allocated downtime and spend this time playing games – non-violent computer and board games. 'They're not just playing Scrabble or chess, they're actually interacting and socialising... taking turns and losing and accepting that'.

Another critical success factor noted was the quality of the staff. Here, the FLC manager was seen as a linchpin in terms of finding and organising the right people to work with particular students: 'It's more about the personality of the teachers being able to accommodate the students. And it's borne out - I mean it's tested time and time again, if one of these talented teachers is away and you have to get a relief teacher in. Discipline can fall apart. The kids immediately recognise an opportunity and it's: "oh ho, here we go" - back to Year 10 behaviour'.

The focus group pointed out that certain kinds of people tend to thrive as FLC teachers: 'you can't take somebody from mainstream who is not interested in this style of teaching, and put them in our classrooms and have then succeed because they won't.' New teachers were not seen as having the requisite life skills, though a few might succeed. The group agreed that to work effectively in the FLC, teachers generally needed to have ten or more years' experience. The group added that many successful teachers tend to come from the fields of Physical Education, Drama, Home Economics and Manual Arts: areas that are hands on, where teachers can think on their feet and develop relationships with people. One of the hardest times of the year for FLC teachers was stated as being the start of the school year, because of the careful judgement involved in getting the mix of students right, and arranging the situation to set up certain friendships and mixes. FLC teachers were described as 'pseudo parents' because 'students actually want some mothering'. It was pointed out that the area could do with more male teachers, but career paths are limited (there is little opportunity for career progression beyond teacher level in this area), which the group saw as possibly deterring males and younger teachers from working in such environments.

Another required teacher trait outlined in the focus group was flexibility: 'it seems to me as well the kinds of teachers who would end up in a Flexible Learning environment would be those who are open to different ways of doing things and therefore have the different mindset.'... 'It starts with the teacher. I kid you not, without these teachers, without any of us, it wouldn't work. It wouldn't be here. You have to have the people who want to do it.' Such people, the group noted, also have to be able to bend the rules a little in regard to systems, assessment and other departmental policies.

As hinted at earlier, the close relationship of staff to students was also deemed as important: 'because we're with them a whole time, it becomes part of what we do, part of who we are.' This relationship involves a

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balance between negotiating with and directing students. On the one hand the relationship involves ‘treating them as reasonable people. You treat them with respect...and respect will come back to you.’ On the other: ‘we’re flexible with their curriculum, but not with their behaviour. Or, we are flexible, but there are limits.’ As stated by the FLC team leader: ‘your whole day is about how to get this kid feeling good and getting some work done. And you work on the issues of why he’s not working and solve that, and then everything else falls into place’. Students still have to abide by Padbury school rules – uniform, code of conduct, use of the Internet (Facebook and the like). They also sign a Workplace Learning Student Agreement stipulating codes of behaviour in the workplace.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the passion and commitment of the staff was seen to be central. This was obvious from the commitment and energy evident in the focus group; one participant had come in on her day off to take part in the focus group, and the interviewer observed several extended, engaged conversations by teachers about particular students. One example of this passion was the extra work undertaken by FLC staff to secure external funding to turn a kitchen sink within the FLC space into a fully working kitchen; cabinet makers and tilers then came in and worked with the male students to build the kitchen.

## SUPPORTING

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Padbury SHS management (Principal, Deputy Principal and other support staff) as well as general staff members were seen as supportive of the aims and activities of the FLC. According to the group, other staff members sometimes express relief in the FLC’s existence, because the FLC takes some of their students who are labelled as ‘difficult’. Mainstream staff members also recognise that the FLC is a positive step for such students. To assist this sense of acceptance, FLC staff pointed out in the focus group that ‘it helps if you can avoid labelling the program as the “naughty kid” program.’ Focus group members also observed that support by school management was crucial: ‘I’ve seen a school where a course was set up and it was supported by the admin. Then the admin changed and within one year that course was gone...Because the principal, the new principal, said we don’t want that sort of thing at our school. And it was gone.’ Practical measures of support by management include the provision of DOTT (Duties Other Than Teaching) time every afternoon: ‘we get together regularly, every afternoon, as a group, which allows us to go “ahhhh”!’ ‘It’s a debrief if you like, on the end of each day.’

In regard to support for students, the FLC employs an education assistant for a half-day a week who works with male students on household life skills such as putting up curtain rails, erecting shelves and changing flat tyres. This assistant also visits students’ workplaces and is seen as a confidante by students: ‘because I was not on the teaching staff, they would come and talk to me’. FLC staff members try to give students tasters of different career options. It’s: ‘extra work, but we’re not fazed by that. Better they change their minds now than later when they’re in a job’. In regard to the School Based Traineeships offered to Year 12 students, payment is seen as a significant incentive: ‘it’s where they’re at’.

Facilities were mentioned as an important part of the FLC’s success: ‘a nice environment’. FLC facilities, after starting with a single classroom in 2006, are now housed in a full school block with four classrooms and central open-plan activity area. The FLC is located opposite the school’s Careers Centre. The FLC provides ‘all the stuff kids need’: staff, stationery, computers and the like.

On a broader level, Education Department support is provided through its District Office mentors; the feedback and recognition was stated as appreciated by the FLC team. The District Office funds the program sufficiently because they recognise its value. Support amongst the West Coast district teacher network is also strong: ‘People exchange more in this network than in any other area.’

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## CONNECTING

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A number of connection mechanisms exist within and without the FLC. Externally, a Careers Liaison Officer is responsible for workplace learning placements, and for finding TAFE places. The FLC coordinator is also a district mentor for other similar courses – she has been ‘doing it for longer than anyone else’. She coordinates the network of such programs in the district. As stated previously, the Department of Education’s District Office supports schools and community programs across the district to become formally designated as engagement programs. The FLC team also brings in expertise from outside, including employment and TAFE and other external providers, to assist in tasks such as driver awareness, buying a car and responsible service of alcohol. These external connections have grown over time.

Internally, FLC staff stated that teachers’ contact with parents is much closer and more regular than in mainstream courses: ‘we know more about them’. Mainstream subject teachers may have around 120 students, whereas FLC staff members have around 20. A phone is kept in teaching rooms for contact with parents. On a student-to-student level, peer activity is built into the FLC’s activities, with Year 12 students sometimes acting as mentors to the Year 11 students. Staff-to-staff support was also mentioned, with one staff member commenting on the support by the FLC coordinator: ‘I’ve seen other schools where they haven’t had that level of admin support and it’s actually been...the programs have been in real trouble. One of the keys to this particular program is that it’s incredibly individually oriented and that is what allows that flexibility to occur. There’s no glossing over of addressing barriers...so it’s not swept under the carpet as it often is in mainstream’. The ability to meet daily was strongly highlighted as an important factor in maintaining staff cohesion and mutual support.

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## EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- ‘And I think data ...I know it’s only been one term, but if we looked at data of attendance rates and success from, even from last term in Year 10 compared to their attendance and success in their first term in Year 11, going from mainstream in Year 10 then into Year 11 Flexible Learning...the difference is already showing up’ (data not cited)
- FLC staff members stated they have quite good statistics on transition beyond year 12, as well as intake and release processes (data not cited to date)
- FLC staff members have stated that graduation rates have gone up in recent years (data not cited)
- FLC staff members stated that measures of success are not clear cut. “If you finish the year with two kids it was successful because they’d all gone to good jobs”. The measure of ‘actually getting to school’ was another success measure for some, and the formation of a career pathway for the first time, are measures of success for other students.
- Some existing data is seen as faulty: FLC staff investigated low completion rates and found that the result was based on the number of students completing the full Certificate in year 12 (FLC students finish their full Certificate in year 11, which was not being counted in the data)
- ‘... I get dismayed with a couple of my students and their parents go “oh no, they’ve done four times as much work with you this year than they did”, or “They’ve attended three times more often.”’
- 2010 saw a large increase in demand with numbers doubling. The year began with two classes of Year 11s (18 in one and 19 in the other) plus two classes of Year 12s, with 13 in one and 14 in the other (data not cited)

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- Growth was strong from 2006 to 2008. The program saw combined classes in 2006 (six Year 11 students and five Year 12 students) and 2007 (four Year 11 students and seven Year 12 students). 2008 saw separate classes introduced (14 Year 11 students and 15 Year 12 students).
  - Staff conveyed that they have seen students' development from the end of Year 10 to the end of Year 11; they have gone from being completely disengaged and 'happy to spend 10 years on the dole', to (with some career guidance) be far more likely to head in a career direction, even if they do not always succeed.

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## CASE STUDY 9: TAFENSW – SYDNEY INSTITUTE: ST GEORGE TRADE SCHOOL

Approximately 2,600 of Sydney Institute's 75,000 students are secondary school students. The Institute delivers a range of TVET courses for students in Years 11 and 12 through its Trade Schools. The Trade Schools offer a broadened range of vocational education and training options for senior secondary students while they are studying traditional academic subjects at school.

Local students from approximately 150 government and non-government schools have accessed the many programs offered through Sydney Institute. Automotive and Nursing are two of the three specialisations offered by the Institute through its St George Trade School located at St George campus.

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### VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND QUALIFICATIONS OFFERED

- Certificate I: a Board of Studies based TVET course
- Certificate II in Automotive – Vehicle servicing
- Certificate II in Automotive sales (Replacement Parts and Accessories)

Both the latter programs are from the national Automotive Retail Service and Repair Training Package (AUR05) and are advertised under the banner of the T3 traineeship program. Through these programs, students can undertake either a part-time apprenticeship or the part-time traineeship in parallel with the Higher School Certificate (HSC).

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### PROGRAMS, STRUCTURE AND FOCUS: AUTOMOTIVE STUDIES

In the TVET Certificate 1 program students undertake some of the earlier units of competency in the Automotive Training Package (AUR05), learning about safety and all aspects of the motor vehicle in general terms. Students also do some simple electrical work and basic servicing.

T3 traineeship program is a Certificate II qualification which includes 3.5 days at school to complete the HSC, 1 day in the workplace earning a part-time wage and half a day at TAFE to obtain a nationally recognised TAFE qualification – the Certificate II in Automotive - Vehicle Servicing which is equivalent to the first year of a trade course.

The 22 units Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) pathway school-based traineeship includes four English units, six Automotive units, four Mathematics units and eight additional units from Board Developed courses. Only two automotive units in Year 12 count towards ATAR. Successful completion of the T3 course offers students a pathway into the Certificate III trade program as an apprentice.

To gain access to the T3 traineeship school students are required to complete an application form with the school being required to add some information about how they believe that a particular student would cope with the literacy and numeracy requirements of the course and with the rigours of taking on a school based traineeship. Applications are assessed by a panel consisting of automotive representatives from the participating manufacturers, TAFE representatives and school sector representatives. After this process has occurred the employers who have also submitted an Expression of Interest for a T3 trainee are contacted. It is then up to the employer to take on a potential trainee on for a couple of days work experience and for an interview.

One particular Toyota dealership takes 15 trainees each year, with other dealers taking one, occasionally two trainees so full classes are generally possible. T3 trainees are employed at local automotive dealerships/retailers. Typically the T3 school-based traineeship can be completed in 24 months.

Those that are not selected into the T3 program are provided with other TVET training opportunities. With the TVET Certificate I course, a process of selection may take place if there are restrictions on places in TAFE. 'If

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the schools and the kids know that it's actually harder getting into a TAFE course...we actually do get a better calibre applying'.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Assessed against the evaluative framework, this component of the case study demonstrated the following evidence against the key success factors:

### TEACHING

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Teachers acknowledge that senior secondary students need to be treated differently than other trade students. School students only attend for four and half hours per week rather than the eight hours that trade students do. With limited experience of two hour classes, a reasonable balance between theory and practical work must be maintained to ensure positive learning outcomes. 'So we try and break it up by taking them to the workshop for periods and doing some teaching in the workshop, combining the theory and the practice together. We find that works pretty well'.

There is also a need to be somewhat more flexible in the way the program is taught and what is expected of students. Whilst they continue to demand a high standard, the trade teachers provide additional support and allow some tolerances with regard to outcomes. In recognition of the age of students, their lack of experience and the fact that they are not in work, approximately 20 per cent more time is dedicated to delivery than for trade programs. 'We are conscious that they need to get through it so we probably assist them a little more, give them a little bit more leeway in terms of their judgement on how good is a good result and push them through where we can'. For example, this group requires more exposure to vehicles than apprentices as they only have access to limited work experience through block release (35 hours in one year). T3 trainees in contrast have actually got a one-day a week job that gives them the important exposure to vehicles that the TVET students do not gain.

Assessment is as rigorous for the T3 program as other trade programs not only to ensure the credibility of graduates, but also to maintain a commitment of quality training to Toyota and other automotive companies who are supporting the program. It is also important that students meet the standards required for their NSW Board of Studies credential. It is possible, however, for students to meet the Board requirements for completion and still not meet the TAFE requirements for competency in the units of competency being undertaken for the VET qualification. 'We spend a deal of time talking with our teachers about, to reinforce to them or to stress to them that they don't have to feel under any obligation to pass these students if they're not worthy of a pass at TAFE in each of those competencies. That will not prevent them from getting their Board of Studies units of credit towards their HSC'.

### SUPPORTING

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The exact same support services that are provided to students across the Institute are available to school students. 'We find that a number of schools and parents prefer certain students to come to TAFE because they're actually going to get more support than they were going to get at school'. Students undertake a language, literacy and numeracy screening at the commencement of the program. This is conducted by Adult Basic Education teachers and follow-up support can be obtained through a drop-in centre. The students are also supported by a TVET coordinator onsite who is the direct liaison person with each of the schools. The TVET coordinator visits classrooms, keeps an eye on the attendance patterns and notifies the schools when students are absent. The college co-ordinator is the one who deals with any issues that teachers might have with students or their schools.

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## CONNECTING

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The T3 (Automotive Technology and Training for Tomorrow) traineeship program is the product of a long-standing partnership with the Toyota Motor Company. Toyota recognised that they needed a much more strategic approach to recruitment of skilled labour in a climate of skill shortages, particularly as attrition amongst those going through the system was high. Toyota wanted apprentices with language and literacy skills at a higher level than those coming through in Year 10. They were of the view that if they had a program where young people were starting their apprenticeship through a traineeship in school it was more likely they would be able to retain them. Moreover, Toyota wanted to keep these employees long term and with further training, step them through into higher levels in the company.

Toyota has been very, very supportive in providing a coordinator who actually works nationally and provides the essential conduit between education, training and industry. 'That's where it works so well, because there is a central person who is prepared to work very closely with the dealerships to encourage them and to make sure that the actual trainees are part, feel part of a program'.

With the success of the T3 Program, other motor companies now access it. The key success factor of this program is that there is a clearly defined pathway from the two Certificate IIs through to the range of Certificate III automotive trade program and on into full time employment in the industry. Moreover it is a well travelled pathway which serves as a beacon for other senior secondary students who have a desire to enter into this industry sector.

## LEADERSHIP

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The success of the program is largely an outcome of the careful maintenance of the very strong relationship between Toyota and Sydney Institute and the commitment of the Toyota's national coordinator of the program, and the teaching and support staff at SIT.

## INFORMING

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Information on the T3 traineeship is provided to schools, students and parents. Network meetings, specific industry and program information evenings together with a strong presence on the website and the Pathways Newsletter are also used to spread the word about the program. A T3 information session is provided at which an overview of the program, enrolment processes and support mechanisms are outlined.

The *T3 school-based traineeship: Selection Handbook for Schools* sets out processes and selection criteria. The selection process goes some way to identifying those students who are strongly motivated, wanting to work in the industry and who are willing to put in the hours required to do both on-job and off-job training whilst still at school. The extent of this commitment should not be under-estimated and it is an important message for potential students to hear prior to applying for the program.

## MONITORING

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Given students are undertaking two qualifications at the one time (HSC and TAFE Certificate), open communication and data sharing between stakeholders in the partnership is seen as critical. Information on student attendance and progress in both programs can be accessed by schools through the Class Learning and Management System (CLAMS). This is particularly important in identifying those students that may need additional support. 'We make sure in our colleges that we have this information flow going backwards and forwards, so there might be notes put in the roll, in the CLAMS system so that the college co-ordinator can go

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in there and check to see what's happening. And that's a really critical factor we find in supporting these students. It's the pastoral care that schools need to know that it's in place'.

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## EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- Long-term relationship with the Toyota Motor Corporation – a sustainable program.
- TAFE NSW news article 11 March 2003: 'The T3 traineeship program has had an unparalleled success rate: 96% of students who began the traineeship in 2001 are now employed by Toyota'.
- Since its launch, the popular traineeship has been expanded to include other vehicle manufacturers (2003).
- Manager of Schools programs: 'It gives them a good introduction to the industry for those who would like to continue on. But I think also in a broader way, it's an introduction to a different type of education and training than they get at school. So they actually come into a TAFE college that is run very differently to what they might have imagined it to be. So it's that bridge to encourage them to think post-school what their options are'.
- Transition on to further study in associated field: from the Certificate I program – somewhere between 15 and 20 per cent articulate into automotive programs. The T3 Certificate II program is highly successful at St George Trade School with approximately 75 per cent of those finishing the program end up completing their apprenticeship in the trade.
- Manager of School programs: 'But even the students who may not, and they're more difficult to track, but the students who return to TAFE because they've had a really good experience here but don't necessarily go into the automotive area they might, well they might go into paint and panel, welding or another trade'.

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## PROGRAMS, STRUCTURE AND FOCUS: NURSING STUDIES

This program was developed to address the lack of a pathway for a number of secondary school students who were doing work experience as part of their Year 10 course and aged care units of competency as a TVET course in Years 11 and 12. A partnership was formed between St George Hospital, the Department of Education and St George TAFE to develop and deliver a new TVET program that provided pathways into the Bachelor of Nursing at university.

Launched in 2005, the program was unique in Australia. The first year delivered by TAFE included a combination of units of competency from the Community Services and Health Training Package while in the second year the Australian Catholic University delivered two modules and a clinical placement out of the early stages of their Bachelor of Nursing. The program could not be counted against UAI, however ACU gave graduates credit for the modules they completed successfully. 'We had students doing better in the Year 12 TVET course than first year university students who did the Bachelor of Nursing – gaining higher passes'.

The New South Wales Board of Studies is currently in the process of putting together a Board-developed Framework (to be called Human Services) Nursing will be included under this framework which will mean it can be counted as an ATAR program. This is seen to be essential in an environment where there is a shortage of health care workers.

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## VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND QUALIFICATIONS OFFERED

- Statement of Attainment in Nursing Studies for students keen to go straight from school to university to study nursing (this course is no longer available in Sydney Institute)

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- Certificate III in Health Services Assistance which can be done either through a school-based traineeship or through a TVET program, with the same program being offered to both cohorts of students. The program is undertaken in combination with the NSW Higher School certificate although the units of study in the Health Services Assistance program do not count towards an ATAR.

Students in Nursing Studies Statement of Attainment undertook 14 subjects over two years. Stage 1 was undertaken in Year 11 and utilised units from the Community Services Training Package (CHCO8) and the Health Training Package (HLT07). Content included Infection control policies and procedures, Assist with client patient movement, Senior First Aid or Work effectively in the health industry, Participate in the work environment and Communicate appropriately with clients. This TAFE component of the program provided grounding in the theory and some practical experience in a simulated environment. Students were assessed on the theory for each subject and had the opportunity to practice and be assessed on the demonstration of skills. For the clinical field studies in the hospital, the workplace and the TAFE teaching department coordinated their approach to delivery to ensure synchronicity. This approach was supported by the use of an assessment book that guided the learning and ‘what they learn in TAFE we let them focus on in the clinical areas’.

Successful completion of Stage 1 allowed students to move on to Stage 2 which was made up of two units drawn from the first stages of the Bachelor of Nursing as delivered by the Australian Catholic University. Constituting 120 hours of training, this component included HSC university theoretical module 1: Developing beginning practitioner skills, HSC University theoretical module 2: Healthcare and academic communication and Clinical Practicum 1 which was undertaken in St George Hospital and ACU.

The Certificate III in Health Services Assistance traineeship is a two year program delivered by TAFE in partnership with Ramsay Health – St George Private Hospital and others sites.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Assessed against the evaluative framework, this component of the case study demonstrated the following evidence against the key success factors:

## TEACHING

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Classes are on the whole much smaller than HSC classes and as a consequence, teachers are able to get to know the students quite well and to provide support when issues arise.

The teaching approach was described by one teacher as ‘creative’. Lessons are broken up into small components with lots of opportunities for discussions, simulations and role plays. A wide variety of methods are employed to make the learning experience stimulating and the approach is practical and ‘even with the theoretical component where you think perhaps there couldn’t be a hands on approach, often you can find one’. Delivery can be quite flexible involving lunch break debriefings.

The expectation is that in both TAFE and the workplace they will behave like adults and act like a professional. ‘By providing them with a bit more responsibility and giving them a bit more scope to develop their personalities within the confines of the classroom, it encourages them to attend class because they are learning things, not just related to nursing by they’re learning hopefully skills to help them survive better’.

At the same time it was noted that the school based trainees (Health Services Assistance Certificate III) are not adults as such and parents are required to provide consent at times. Parents of trainees are required to sign contracts of training, for example.

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Unlike the traineeship group, the non-trainees undertaking the TVET program tend to find it more difficult to apply the theory and the skills that they have learned in a simulated environment and therefore require more practice and mentoring to be able to put it into practice in the real setting. Transition into work is also not as easy as for this group as for the school-based trainees. As a consequence, the non-trainees may not be as confident as the trainees. What is missing for this group is the concrete connection with the workplace on a continuing basis.

## SUPPORTING

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This nursing case study substantiates the importance of sustaining good working relationships between all stakeholders – schools, TAFE, employers and students. This point is best exemplified by the statement ‘one of the pillars of support for all the programs and all the students is the partnerships, the partnerships between us’. The school-based trainees are allocated a preceptor in the workplace for the whole period of their training so they have ready access to an experienced person to guide their learning. At the St George Private Hospital, the Education and Recruitment manager has initiated additional ‘informal coffee catch-ups’ where trainees are able to debrief. Individual trainees from other health facilities are also invited to participate to overcome some of the isolation that they might face. ‘It’s definitely about debriefing, mentoring, preceptoring’.

Support for these students in TAFE is exactly the same as with any other students within Sydney Institute with the addition of the support provided by the TVET coordinator on site. The preliminary preparation and selection process works well so there is not a great demand for any form of support by these students. ‘The people that entered the course have been well chosen and are well ready for it - very enthusiastic and very proactive and quite passionate about it’. Where required, individualised, one-on-one support is provided for students so that they can be ‘teed up’ in a peer mentoring arrangement with other students who might be doing a little better.

It is apparent, that those who seek to do the program through a school-based traineeship are better academically than those who chose to undertake the TVET program. However, the quality of the students and the passion of both teachers and students make the programs successful.

## CONNECTING

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Nursing Studies was an initiative of a consortium made up of TAFE, schools, universities and industry. The current Health Services Assistance Certificate III continues to be based upon strong relationships and coordination between key stakeholders. The relationships are seen to be critical to the success of the program. For example, the St George Private Hospital informant noted ‘I haven’t had anyone leave our program of the school based trainees that commenced but I have worked really hard with a combination of the Education Department and TAFE. The partnership has been really strong’. This work has focused on planning to ensure that program timing is such that it eases the trainees’ burden of managing their learning in dual qualifications, that is the HSC and the TAFE credential.

For students, the defined pathways beyond the program offer significant opportunities for transition to further study. With the 2005 cohort of Nursing Studies students, 100 per cent of the students went to the Bachelor of Nursing. From that time there was some attrition from the program, however that was as a consequence of the students deciding that the tertiary pathway was not for them. In acknowledgement of this, there was an early exit point built into the program at the end of year one for those wanting a different pathway. Students taking this route gained credit into other courses undertaken at TAFE and the work they had done in the program counted towards the preliminary record of achievement for the Department of Education.

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## LEADERSHIP

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Amongst the group much emphasis was placed upon the importance of having individuals within the participating organisations who are prepared to be the leader in the driving the project. 'Within the partnerships, one of the critical elements to have is a champion, or a driver or someone with a passion about it rather than the organisations saying *'You've got to do this'*'. This has to also occur in the workplace, as the success of the program is also dependent upon people in workplaces accepting and supporting trainees.

## INFORMING

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The success of programs is very much dependent upon quality information being provided to students and schools. Potential students receive details about the program through information sessions which are organised with the schools. These sessions include presentations by trainees currently involved in the program and others working in the various health facilities. Students are provided with clear information about what to expect not only from the program but also about what nurses and nursing assistants do in their day to day working lives. This information is not sanitised and students are able to get a clear idea about what is involved. There is a comprehensive application form and applicants are interviewed by both the Department and employers. This allows both to get an idea about student intentions and expectations of the course and pathways beyond the TVET or traineeship program. On the basis of this interview they may be encouraged to take a particular pathway – either the traineeship or TVET route. If they have done work experience in the area in Year 10 that does help to inform decisions about which route they might take. Of the 60 to 80 who attend information sessions, 24 are interviewed and around 12 are selected. The numbers however, are dependent upon the hospitals' capacity to take trainees.

In the conduct of the programs, the maintenance of open communication channels between TAFE and employers with the schools is also a critical factor. The St George Private Hospital informant noted that they had worked hard to keep the communication channels open, particularly with the careers advisors in school. They had invited them in to look at the hospital and the curriculum to ensure that careers advisors and teachers understand what the program is about. This well-directed promotion has encouraged some schools to build flexibilities into their own timetabling in support of effective learning for students undertaking these vocational programs. 'We've got schools that start some periods at seven in the morning to allow extra sessions before they [the students] come'.

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## EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- Of those students undertaking the nursing Studies program there was 100 per cent retention in Stage 1 in the initial group and approximately 80 per cent retention in Stage 2. With subsequent cohorts, retention remained at similarly high levels.
- Positive student evaluations about all aspects of the program and confirmation from graduates that their intention is to continue on with further study in the nursing field. For example, seven trainees recently completing the program through St George Private Hospital have all remained in some part of nursing either going on to the Bachelor in Nursing, or the Diploma model through TAFE or in employment as an assistant nurse in the hospital.
- There is evidence of increasing interest in the program with between 60 and 80 attending orientation sessions. 'This pathway will take off even further. ...it is well established now and it's running really well. But I think with an emphasis towards that particular level of worker, health services

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assistants...you are going to see more and more students for whom this pathway is going to be an absolutely viable option for them’.

- The program is being replicated elsewhere across NSW. In 2008, 343 Year 11 and 12 students from more than 110 high schools were undertaking nationally recognised training in Nursing Studies (NSW Health 2008, Workforce Development and Leadership).
- Positive industry response reflected in the following comment:

...we like to grow our own and we’re looking at other avenues and this is certainly a way of capturing them early before they leave school and seeing them develop right through and become ENs [enrolled nurses], RNs [registered nurses], CNs [clinical nurses] and educators of the future, whatever pathway they want. I think maybe that’s why a lot of them are staying within the health sector because before they even finish we’re already helping them to look at different pathways (Private health company workforce planning manager).

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## CONCLUSION

Retention to Year 12 and successful transition to work or further study have become a priority for all Australian Governments. The National Partnerships on Youth Attainment and Transitions provides the policy framework for a range of programs designed to ‘increase the educational engagement and attainment of young people and to improve their transition to post school education, training and employment through immediate, concerted action supported by broader long term reform’. This confirms the generally recognized view that completion of Year 12 or its equivalent provides a sound foundation for further study or transition into the world of work.

This series of case studies in *Enhancing retention of young people to year 12, especially through vocational skills* has explored the way vocational programs have been adapted and adopted in response to particular contexts and student cohort needs. This research also confirms for students to feel connected to their education; they need to have the sense that they belong in the educational environment and that this environment is responsive to their needs. Focus group participants confirmed that such an approach can lead to increased student persistence and achievement.

Key factors such as the relationship between teachers and students, the relationships between students and other students, the appropriateness of the pedagogy, and the nature of the learning environment are also consistently identified as imperative to student success. Drawing on the evaluative framework as a guide, this study also suggests that while the paths to success may differ from site to site, and the types of vocational education programs and pathways often vary from one jurisdiction to another. Needless to say the main factors for success bore a broad similarity across all case study sites and programs. The factors seen to be critical for successful program outcomes consistently highlighted the following: targeted information, effective monitoring, quality teaching, coordinated support, the development of student connections and organisational leadership.

In terms of specific key success factors, *Leading* requires the provision of productive student-centred environments by RTOs for students and staff. This includes supportive leadership which creates the accommodating learning environments, the organizational culture and climate and the financial and physical resources to ensure the student-teacher ratios are appropriate to the context and adequate resources are dedicated to support and sustain programs. In terms of *Informing*, information about programs is provided to all stakeholders in a holistic way including flyers, information nights, advice about the application process, work experience, appropriate assessment and awards. For *Identifying*, identifications of student intentions and goals, assessment of foundation skills and the monitoring of attendance and information exchange about ‘at risk’ students is critical. *Supporting* involves carefully coordinated and integrated student support which includes both internal and external support services such as counselling staff, learning support staff and disabilities support. Successful programs tend to employ and retain staff with passion and commitment, and staff members are provided with the autonomy to negotiate with key stakeholders in the community, industry and in other training providers.

When reflecting on *Teaching*, focused professional development opportunities for staff were highlighted as important along with mentor programs. Successful programs also valued skilled teachers and skilled vocational teachers working closely together to meet the diverse needs of student cohorts. These staff believe that it is important to have the time and space to develop positive relationships with youth in order to keep them engaged in education. Team work and support for each other was seen to be helpful and relevant to program delivery, as was integrated curriculum and assessment. Teachers in successful programs valued reflective practice and opportunities to review and modify what works well and what needs modification.

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*Connecting* involved the development of partnerships with industry, as well as relationships with support workers, parents, Departments of Education and the community. Importantly, staff working with young people felt that the establishment of supportive relationships amongst students was equally as critical. As a consequence, peer mentoring was a common feature of many of the programs reported in the case studies.

Of course, many of the factors listed in the evaluative framework were interrelated and could not be separated out as individual entities or identified as single factors. Instead they were frequently integrated in programs in a variety of ways. For example, leading, supporting and connecting were often discussed as one factor. Connecting was interrelated to students but also to external relationships such as those developed with parents, industry and the community.

The cases included in this study demonstrate the diversity of vocational programs available to 15 to 19 year olds through schools, a blend of schools and TAFE and vocational colleges and trade schools that are now a feature of a number of TAFE institutes in Victoria, the ACT and New South Wales. Context and cohort needs matter, and as a consequence the programs offered adopt different approaches but all provide nationally-recognised qualifications, structured pathways to further study and options and opportunities to take up employment.

Significantly, the successful vocational programs outlined in this study invariably deployed a whole-of-organisation approach to the promotion of VET as a viable educational option and the provision of the coordinated support, tailored curriculum, professional development of teachers and support staff and structured pathways necessary to optimize student outcomes.

The case studies also offered evidence of negative perceptions of VET held by students, parents, careers advisors, and teachers. The coordination of the range of activities involved in conducting work experience, study programs, and varying funding models can be difficult. Supporting students with high needs is costly. Data collection and accessibility of student records within and between providers needs to be improved especially in terms of tracking students as they move between systems.

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## APPENDICES

The following are included as appendices to this report:

1. Review of the literature
2. Focus group protocol and question schedule
3. Focus group participants - support staff and external stakeholders

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## APPENDIX 1: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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### ENHANCING RETENTION AND TRANSITION – THE IMPERATIVES

Retention to Year 12 and successful transition to work or further study have become a priority for all Australian Governments, for it is recognised that school completion provides the sound foundation required to undertake further study or transition into employment. The criticality of completion cannot be understated.

*Year 12 completion is important to success in the first year following school; school completers are more likely than early school leavers to enter further study, and have an advantage entering the labour market, and are also more likely to secure full-time work (Keating & Walsh 2009:5)*

The 2006 Australian Census, however, revealed that only 71 per cent of 19 year olds had attained Year 12 and in comparison with other OECD countries, the participation and completion rates of young Australians fall well short of what is perceived to be an acceptable mark. The *Compact with Young Australians* announced by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in April 2009 is designed to address this problem by providing Australia's youth with guaranteed access to education and training places. As stated in the policy documentation, the *National Partnership on Youth Attainment* ' aims to increase the educational engagement and attainment of young people and to improve their transition to post school education, training and employment through immediate, concerted action supported by broader long term reform' (<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Pages/NationalPartnership.aspx>).

The \$623 million provided under the National Partnership will fund:

- services through the Youth Connections program to ensure young people at risk of not attaining Year 12 or an equivalent qualification get the support they need to remain engaged, or to re-engage in education or training and build resilience, skills and attributes that promote positive choices and wellbeing;
- the School Business Community Partnership Brokers program, to build community capacity and infrastructure and improve community and business engagement with schools to extend learning beyond the classroom, increase student engagement, deepen learning experiences, lift attainment and improve educational outcomes;
- states and territories to maximise engagement, attainment and successful transitions through the areas of career development, multiple learning pathways, and mentoring, and
- national career development initiatives administered by the Commonwealth.

The Compact's National Youth Participation Requirement also makes participation in education, training or work compulsory for all young people until they reach 17 years of age and further to increasing opportunities for young people to participate in education and training, the Compact has also set a national Year 12 completion target of 90 per cent by 2015. Just how challenging this target might be to achieve is emphasised by Keating and Walsh (2009) who calculate that it will require a doubling of the rate recorded between the 2001 census and the census of 2006. Despite these concerns, it is evident that significant funding will be made available to enhance delivery of education and training for Australia's young people.

Education, in combination with experience in the workplace is perceived to make a significant contribution to successful transition of young people from school to work (OECD cited in Australian Industry Group & Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2007: 19). However, this process of transition for a percentage of young people is also problematic (Keating & Walsh 2009). Thus, in parallel with the focus upon retention in the education and training system, there have been increasing demands from both government and industry for improved

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mechanisms for facilitating the movement of young people from school into the workforce. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2007), for example, stressed the importance of successful transition noting that an understanding of the world of work and ready access to quality vocational education and training including VET in Schools programs and school-based apprenticeships were essential to achieving effective pathways to the workplace. Ensuring young people had workplace exposure and work readiness was actively promoted during schooling was seen as crucial by the National Industry Skills Committee (2007). Ultimately, improved pathways and smooth transitions from school to work have also been seen as a mechanism for raising workforce participation - a critical goal if Australia is to avoid future skills shortages and counter the impact of population ageing (Skills Australia 2010).

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## THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

There is considerable agreement in the literature that vocational education and training has an important role to play in providing alternative pathways to further education and work for young people who do not wish to follow an academic route. Apprenticeships and traineeships can provide a direct passage to employment, while other vocational programs offer either an alternative qualification to the general certificate of education or one that integrates both academic and vocational units in a qualification that is eligible for an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank.

Vocational programs for young people have been identified as having both economic and social benefits. In the first instance, they open up opportunities for employment. This smoothing of transition to full-time work is confirmed in the recent Foundation for Young Australian reports (Lamb & Mason 2008; Robinson & Lamb 2009) confirming the views of Woods (2007) who found that for early school leavers vocational programs had a positive impact upon the successful movement into activities beyond school particularly when combined with part-time work. Such programs provided students with real and relevant vocational experiences 'to learn from when considering possible career options' (Woods 2007:1). In addition, for those that go on to take up apprenticeships and traineeships, the potential for full-time employment is greatly increased (Curtis 2008). For young Indigenous students, there is evidence that vocational programs can lead to significantly improved engagement and increased participation in education and training (Hill & Helme 2005), while vocational programs including structured work placements have encouraged young people in rural areas to persist at school and transition successfully into local employment (Johns, Kilpatrick & Loechel 2004). In a study of 2004 Higher School Certificate VET students in New South Wales (Polesel, Teese, Lamb, Helme, Nicholas & Clarke, 2005) reported that 60 per cent of students who chose a VET subject agreed that this had been a factor in them staying on until Year 12. Further 'this agreement was reported for 70% of students with the lowest achievement profile and represented 75% of the lowest achieving boys' (cited in Stanley, 2007:97). Similarly, an analysis of data from Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) by Alnezark, Karmel and Oong (2006:7) revealed that students engage in VET in Schools programs because 'they see these programs as providing a better match with their perceived academic ability'.

Despite these findings the analysis by Alnezark et al (2006) also found that improved retention did not occur evenly across the post secondary years. Vocational programs were influential in retaining young people at school between the Years 10 and 11, but were somewhat less influential in encouraging students to progress from Year 11 to Year 12. The authors therefore concluded that 'replacing Year 12 with the vocational equivalent does not materially change this result' (Alnezark et al 2006:8). In relation to the transition of young people from school to work, there appears to be greater consensus that vocational programs enhance transition. Gørgens and Ryan (2006) for example found that there was a link between employment rates and VET qualifications, particularly for young people undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships. Alnezark et al (2006) established that pathways to further education and training were better for young males who had undertaken building or engineering programs, although the same did not apply for young females. Year 11 was

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again a point at which transition was most improved. In light of their findings, Alnezark et al (2006:8) concluded:

... the transition for school VET students who leave school after Year 11 is certainly smoother than those who do not participate in school VET programs. However, the gain is soon diminished over time. For students who complete Year 12, we see no benefit from participation in school VET programs, in fact we see a slightly negative effect.

Building increasing amounts of vocational education and training into secondary schooling has been a common educational response to increasing attrition by less academically inclined young people. It is suggested that this approach is based upon the assumption that 'workplace competencies can be developed in more practical and work-focused subjects which will ultimately provide a variety of pathways and learning experiences for potentially disengaged learners' (Stanley 2007:96). However, despite the broad acceptance that school-based vocational programs can be valuable for young people, particularly those who are most likely to leave school early, the focus should remain in retaining young people in school until they complete Year 12. When accompanied by other supportive strategies, vocational programs have considerable potential to further engage students and encourage them to persist at school until they have completed their senior secondary education (Muir, Mullan, Powell, Flaxman, Thompson & Griffiths 2009).

It is also recognised within the literature that many students do not undertake a vocational programs during the latter years of their schooling with the intent of going on into further study or employment in a particular area. Many of the student and stakeholder informants to a study by Porter (2006) noted the value of vocational qualifications, but others emphasised that the development of generic skills such self-confidence, teamwork and good communication were more important than following a particular occupational pathway. In fact, some authors caution against placing too much emphasis upon using vocational education and training programs as a means of ameliorating disengagement and disadvantage, but rather stressed the need to highlight the benefits that can be gained through the provision of high quality programs and the development of clearly delineated pathways.

*The role of these programs should not be to relieve the pressure of student diversity in schools, but to provide a quality pathway to employment or further education. VET programs should have valuable and demonstrable benefits and should involve the same commitment to effective learning and personal growth as ought to underlie retention in school (Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers & Rumberger 2004:10).*

While there is some contention about the outcomes from vocational programs offered in schools, the growth in numbers of young people engaging in VET in some form would seem that its capacity to attract, engage and retain young people cannot be discounted. When compared with 2007, 2008 data for example, revealed an increase of nearly 26 per cent in the total number of students participating in VET in Schools, with school-based apprentices and trainee numbers increasing by 72 per cent and enrolments in other vocational programs increasing by 22 per cent (NCVER 2010:6). Numbers of young people participating in vocational programs in schools in 2008 consisted of:

- 222 000 VET in Schools students, representing 41.0% of school students undertaking senior secondary certificate
- 25 700 school-based apprentices and trainees, representing 11.7% of all VET in Schools students
- 194 200 students enrolled in other VET in Schools programs, representing 88.3% of all VET in Schools students (NCVER 2010:6)

Moreover, the participation rates for 15 to 19 year olds in publicly funded VET by 15 to 19 year olds have been consistently around 30 per cent since 2005 (NCVER 2009:10). As would be expected, a proportion of these

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young people are early school leavers choosing to undertake their vocational programs full-time in TAFE rather than school. However, TAFE Institutes have also responded with different approaches to provision for young people of school-age with introduction of Trade Schools in New South Wales (Sydney Institute) and Vocational Colleges in the ACT (Canberra Institute of Technology) and Victoria (Holmesglen).

This growth of interest in vocational programs in schools has meant that Year 12 certification has widened and has been made more flexible by offering a range of programs encapsulating units of competency drawn from a range of nationally endorsed Training Packages (The Parliament of Australia 2009:98). Various approaches have been adopted to achieve this, including the integration of some units of competency as a component within an ATAR eligible program, dual qualifications (senior secondary certificate and a vocational qualification) and the innovative Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). The new Queensland Certificate of Education also offers students the opportunity to blend a Senior Certificate with Certificate II or III vocational qualification with a work option (The Parliament of Australia 2009:99).

With increasing numbers of young people undertaking vocational education and training programs, Mc Millan and Curtis (2008) suggest that greater attention must be paid to the factors associated with student engagement and successful participation.

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## FACTORS IMPACTING UPON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND DISENGAGEMENT

Numerous authors have highlighted the significant impact that low retention and completion have on young people. Sweet (2005), for example proposes that for able students, the Australian education and training system provides adequate transitional pathways beyond school. For those who perform less ably, however, the situation may be somewhat different. Lamb (2009:23), describes the consequences of failing to complete Year 12 or its equivalent in vocational qualifications as including 'poorer labour market outcomes and greater insecurity in building careers'. And, citing other studies on early school-leaving undertaken in Australia and overseas Lamb suggests that non-completers are 'more likely to become unemployed, stay unemployed for longer, have lower earnings, and over the course of their life accumulate less wealth (Rumberger & Lamb, 2003). Given these outcomes, it would seem most appropriate to examine the characteristics of those who choose to leave school early.

The OLMEC report (2007:12), *Re-Start: Innovative approaches to early school leaving in England and Wales* highlights a number of factors that are influential in student under-achievement, disengagement and early leaving. These factors are grouped around aspects relating to the school environment, family factors and aspects of individual disposition. School factors include the low status of vocational education, the lack of alternative education with little formalized accreditation, a lack of investment in pastoral support, inappropriate pedagogy, community or regional factors, economic/social deprivation and unemployment, teacher expectations or prejudices, the institutional nature of schools and irrelevant curriculum. Family factors include education not being valued, absences condoned by parents, dysfunctional families, family problems, a lack of parenting skills, different social behavioural expectations and cultural constraints. Individual factors associated with student disengagement include peer pressure or poor peer relationships, a lack of self-esteem or self-confidence, a lack of social skills, an inability to cope with traditional assessment procedures, boredom, lack of engagement, learning problems and experiences of racism.

Whilst there are a multiplicity of factors which have the potential to influence young people's decisions to 'drop out' of school or vocational education and training, the quality of teaching and learning can also be a major barrier to student retention. Martinez (2001), in representing the work of various authors, highlighted the following teaching-related issues as having a significant impact upon student attrition:

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- uninspiring, 'boring' or poorly structured teaching
  - poor group ethos or group dynamics
  - poor course organisation
  - inadequate or poor course design
  - excessive or poorly scheduled assessment
  - a mismatch between the largely 'activist' and 'hands-on' preferences of students and the more theoretical preferences of some of their teachers

The crucial retention challenge, Lamb (2009) suggests is to find ways of addressing the plethora of needs that young people at risk of disengaging tend to possess.

Young people who leave school before obtaining a qualification tend to come from disadvantaged social backgrounds, they tend more often to have become disengaged from school, are less motivated scholastically, and more often experience personal difficulties and behavioural issues that place them at risk...They also tend to have histories of school failure and low academic achievement during the compulsory years.

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#### KEY SUCCESS FACTORS IN RETAINING YOUNG PEOPLE

Within the extensive research that has been undertaken into student disengagement, there is general agreement amongst authors about the changes required in order to keep young people at school until they complete Year 12 or an equivalent qualification. First and foremost, there is broad recognition that those students who are not academically minded and find traditional schooling too structured and confining prefer an adult learning environment in which they have a measure of control over what and how they learn. They also need to be provided with the extensive support structures essential in addressing specific learner needs. Sweet (2005: 2) also suggests that:

' schools must offer young people of upper-secondary age a wider range of more interesting subjects to choose from, tailored to the needs of the full range of adolescents' developing vocational and personal interests'.

In acknowledging that traditional school was not a viable option for all young people, Cole (2004:8-9) suggested the emphasis needed to be placed upon 'the quality of the environment, relationships and activities' for they are what builds the essential connections and commitment to learning. The critical aspects for ensuring student engagement and retention Cole identified as:

- A sense of self-worth and confidence is usually a necessary precursor to gaining a commitment to making an effort to learn
- Activities that are enjoyable, and provide opportunities to socialise are generally needed to re-engage participants who have poor literacy skills and /or an aversion to 'school learning'
- Young people need sound role models, to be clear about expectations, to be given clear boundaries, and to receive guidance and support in developing positive, healthy and safe relationships with peers and adults
- The establishment of trust, mutual respect and concern for others in the program is often a precursor to gaining a commitment to making an effort to learn.

Other authors have also examined the various aspects that are seen to be influential in promoting student retention. For example, Butler, Bond, Drew, Krelle and Seal (2005:7) listed the following as crucial in the promotion of learner engagement.

- A supportive school culture
- A sense of belonging and being valued
- Friendly and mutually respectful teacher/student relationships
- Genuine involvement and participation in a broad range of school activities, including participation in decision-making
- Opportunities for cooperative learning
- Catering for a diversity of learning styles
- Options for practical and applied knowledge
- Work that is worthy of effort rather than routine, trivial or superficial
- Content that is meaningful, significant and part of the real life of young people
- Learning and teaching practices that are challenging, active, deep, thought-provoking and cooperative
- Collaboration between teachers and students in the learning experience
- Opportunities to develop confidence in abilities to master environment (personal efficacy)
- Opportunities to make a contribution to one’s community and developing a sense of mattering
- Contributions being noticed and acknowledged
- School goals that are clearly stated and honest
- Strong links between families, schools and broader community resources
- Success oriented assessment that is designed to give feedback on what has been achieved
- Having a chance to make mistakes and learn from them

In a similar vein, Lamb (2009:24-25) emphasised the importance of three areas critical in enhancing student retention in schools - a supportive school culture, school-wide strategies and student-focused strategies. The strategies identified by Lamb in the following table confirm the views of many others working and researching in this area.

**Table X: Effective strategies to improve school retention**

Areas addressed	Strategies
Supportive school culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to success for all</li> <li>• Flexibility and responsiveness to individual need</li> <li>• High expectations</li> <li>• Shared vision</li> <li>• Focus on continuous improvement</li> <li>• Climate of challenging and stimulating teaching</li> <li>• Strong and fair disciplinary climate</li> <li>• Encouraging student responsibility and autonomy</li> </ul>
School-wide strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broad curriculum provision in the senior years</li> <li>• Offering quality VET options</li> <li>• Providing programs that are challenging and stimulating</li> <li>• Early intervention to support literacy and numeracy skill growth</li> <li>• Programs to counter low achievement</li> <li>• Pathways planning and quality careers guidance and counselling</li> <li>• Strategic use of teachers and teaching resources</li> <li>• Smaller class sizes</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini-school or school-within-school organisation</li> <li>• Team-based approaches to teaching, learning and pastoral care</li> <li>• Priority professional development</li> <li>• Community service</li> <li>• Cross-sectoral initiatives</li> <li>• Attendance policies and programs</li> <li>• Initiatives to improve connections with parents</li> <li>• Conflict resolution, mediation and problem-solving programs</li> </ul>
Student-focused strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student case management</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Welfare support</li> <li>• Targeted assistance and skill development among low achievers</li> <li>• Tutoring and peer tutoring</li> <li>• Supplementary or out-of-school time programs</li> <li>• Pathways planning for at-risk students</li> <li>• Targeted financial support</li> <li>• Project-based learning for disengaged students</li> </ul>

Source: Lamb (2009:24-25)

All of the factors previously outlined reflect the key success factors for upper secondary skilling which were also formulated in a TAFE Directors Australia - Australian College of Educators forum in Hobart in 2008. With a focus on vocational education and training, these factors were couched more in terms of what providers might do to enhance retention, completion and transition.

Providers of vocational programs need to:

12. Develop an environment that demonstrates to students and parents that vocational pathways have parity in outcome and esteem with parallel academic programs.
13. Provide strong pastoral care, personal concern and access to career counselling services.
14. Have a substantial general education program that is occupationally relevant but that can lead to further study.
15. Adopt a view that basic literacy and numeracy are fundamental skills for further education.
16. Involve social partnerships with employers, educationalists and the community.
17. Provide structured learning in real work settings.
18. Utilise applied and project based methodology.
19. Attempt to maximise outcomes for students socially, occupationally and educationally with a set of extra-curricular activities, and utilise sport and outdoor education as areas to promote social skills and teamwork.
20. Have a clear identity, which builds student self-esteem and a sense of pride, encompassing work based learning, respecting the unique needs of all students.
21. Have a focus on student's individual needs and interests.
22. Provide a structured framework for skills development and pathways into work. (TDA, 2009 cited in Lewanski, Clayton, Pancini & Schutt 2010:4)

Whilst a great amount of the literature cited has focused upon academic learning and school rather than vocational education and training, the messages about what keeps young people in education are quite consistent. As Lewanski et al (2010:5) suggest the 'factors seen to be critical for successful program outcomes... can be categorised under the headings of targeted information, identification of needs, effective monitoring, quality teaching, coordinated support, the development of connections and organisational leadership'. Each of these key success factors forming the framework for this research is now briefly outlined.

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## TARGETED INFORMATION

The dissemination of accurate and appropriately targeted information about vocational programs has been identified as crucial in engaging key players with the options and opportunities that VET offers. Central to this information is early career counselling and guidance which is specifically tailored to suit the needs individuals. In the report *State of Australia's young people* (Muir, Mullan, Powell, Flaxman, Thompson and Griffiths, 2009, p.46) suggested that career advice and information played an important role in assisting young people to transition from education into the workforce. Reinforcing this view, Halliday-Wynes, Beddie & Saunders (2008: 3) suggested that schools offering vocational programs 'are more effective in promoting non-university options to the students through careers counseling and advice and are more successful in creating pathways to tertiary VET providers'.

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## IDENTIFICATION OF NEEDS

Throughout the literature on early school leaving, an emphasis is placed on the importance of setting in place systematic processes for identifying 'at risk' students so that strategies can be put in place to monitor progress and provide individually-tailored support. Early diagnosis of issues associated with language, literacy and numeracy provides the foundation upon which personalised learning plans and support can be put in place. Some understanding of past student experiences, interests, expectations of the program and future work or study intentions can also be elicited to assist in negotiating the most suitable program for individual students. As Cole (2004) suggests undertaking an early needs assessment and adopting a case management approach to meeting the particular needs of individuals can go a considerable way to ensuring positive outcomes for even the most 'at risk' students.

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## EFFECTIVE MONITORING

Effective monitoring of student engagement is also identified within the literature as a crucial activity for educational institutions if they want to set in place early intervention strategies to retain students and measure the outcomes of those strategies. Martinez (2001) emphasised the importance of closely monitoring and following up on students whose attendance patterns indicate a potential to disengage. Monitoring provides the opportunity for teachers and support staff to identify from the start those students who are under-performing or those that potentially are 'at risk'. However, monitoring of student engagement does require good communication between teachers, support staff, students and their parents and as suggested by the South Australian Social Inclusion Board (2007:9):

*It also means having protocols between teachers and other staff to share information so that signs of disengagement can be recognized and intervention can be timely, individualized, positive and non-judgemental'.*

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## QUALITY TEACHING

James. St Leger and Ward(2001:56-60) provided a set of critical success factors considered to represent 'best practice' in programs developed specifically for this group of students. These factors included additional assistance in classes; positive discipline and understanding teachers who recognised the specific needs of adolescents; a curriculum that focused on work and offered a variety of learning experiences; learning new work and life skills; learning to work with others and providing opportunities to develop learner competence and confidence.

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There is also considerable evidence within the literature that pedagogical practices that are based on an initial analysis of individual learner requirements and specifically tailored teaching approaches best serve the needs of students at risk. Research indicates that certain teaching strategies make a significant difference in engaging and re-engaging young people in education. These strategies include motivating students by selecting activities, resources and projects that they enjoy and have been involved in choosing, personalising education and training in a manner that matches specific individual learning needs, structuring and adapting the pace of learning and training has to reflect young people's experiences and interests and learning needs to be configured into activities that acknowledge these experiences and interests. As Stanley (2007:95) suggests: 'typically, post-compulsory programs are seen as involving choice and students tend to want subjects that they feel interested in and in which they feel they have some chance of succeeding'.

Within the literature it is accepted that tailoring the curriculum to meet student needs acknowledges the learning styles and learning preferences of individuals and the diversity that exists within student cohorts is of paramount importance. Learner-centred teaching strategies that integrate academic, vocational and foundation skills development in a framework of applied; experiential and collaborative learning has the potential to greatly enhance student engagement, teamwork, self-esteem and work-readiness. Learner-centred teaching also acknowledges the importance of building relationships between young people that are 'respectful and trusting, involve negotiation and choice, emphasise learning to learn and recognize learner goals' (South Australian Social Inclusion Board 2007:16).

Stehlik (2006) stresses the importance of developing alternative programs and pathways for young people for whom engagement is potentially an issue. He suggests that individually negotiated learning plans that encompass student interests together with intensive support to address particular learning needs, such as literacy and numeracy are paramount in sustaining student interest and commitment to the learning process. Further, 'young people who are restricted by or excluded from mainstream schooling situations and structures require flexibility of learning provision and opportunities to experience learning in contexts that are relevant and meaningful to them' (Stehlik 2006:7)

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## COORDINATED SUPPORT

The need for an integrated set of support mechanisms for students deemed at risk of leaving school early is a consistent thread throughout the literature. Support has many facets, but one of the most critical is the support of teachers. Fleming and Murphy (2001) explores the issue of staff sensitivity noting that while this topic was frequently mentioned in the literature, there was a need to consider it more fully. Insensitivity, the authors suggested was reflected by the low expectations and negative attitudes held by teachers of students coming from educationally and other disadvantaged backgrounds. The competence of staff and their levels of commitment to what Fleming and Murphy (2001:31) call 'preventative education projects' for students at risk are also crucial to the role they play in their success. Citing earlier research in the area:

*The pivotal role of teachers in the success of any initiative was clear...Respondents felt that some teachers may not see the value of these initiatives and therefore would not support them or adopt their methods...There was a sense that teachers may be fearful of losing control in the class if they adopt a new approach or become involved in a new initiative (Boldt 1996, p.51 cited in Fleming & Murphy, 2001, p.31).*

Maintenance of student engagement requires an inclusive school/college environment in which supportive relationships with peers are encouraged and supported through staff and peer mentoring. For students who are in particular danger of disengaging from education, both individualised and cohort specific pastoral care are seen to be desirable.

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## DEVELOPMENT OF CONNECTIONS

Regardless of the approach adopted to enhance retention of students to Year 12, further study or work it is evident from the literature that no one strategy is likely to be effective on its own. Rather, what is required is a collection of strategies that operate in a coordinated and integrated manner and which help build social capital – ‘the positive social interactions and networks that produce social trust within families, schools and communities, and lead to cooperation for a common benefit (James & St Leger 2003:6).

At the foremost of these connections is the one between teachers and their students.

At the crux of this are relationships between educators and young people: relationships in which there is decision making and negotiation around learning; where students have a voice and feel they are being listened to; and where there is recognition, sensitivity and respect for their individual social contexts and background, including cultural and socio-economic issues (SA Social Inclusion Board, 2007:8).

The importance of other stakeholders making and maintaining effective connections is an equally critical factor if the outcomes from vocational programs for young people are to be attained. This includes improved linkages between teachers, support staff, students and peers as well as improved curriculum and an improved school climate (James, St Leger & Ward 2001). In many of the educational programs he evaluated in South Australia, Stehlik (2006) also found that the connections made between schools, teachers and students and the local community, unpaid volunteers and other stakeholders proved to be of significant importance. In fact, he suggested that ‘a whole-of-community approach to education is emerging as a key factor in successfully engaging young people at risk’ (Stehlik 2006:7) a proposition that was also put by Butler and her colleagues (2005) when they suggested that disengagement was one problem that could only be addressed by integrating the efforts of school, family and relevant agencies within the community. Linkages therefore needed to be established between individual students and their peers; between students and school activities during and outside school; between students and resources and sources of information and between students and community agencies, employers structured pathways into further education and work.

However, Fleming and Murphy (2001) acknowledge that to establish good working relationships with all of the key stakeholders involved in the process requires parity of esteem, open communication and equality in decision-making (and possibly risk-taking). This is particularly true for schools which are engaging with employers. As Cole (2004) suggests extending supportive networks and enhancing learning opportunities for students in workplaces demands close cooperation and coordination to ensure positive outcomes for students. Through this process, pathways to employment and further training can be established.

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## ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Lamb (2009:24) highlighted the important role that leadership plays in the development of quality programs and positive outcomes for learners when he suggested:

*...effective schools are characterised by strong leadership, a clear focus on achievement, supportive and positive school culture or climate, including supportive relationships among students and teachers, good communications with parents, and targeted programs that address the needs of different groups of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.*

Good leadership is reflected in the provision of direction and the maintenance of an organizational climate that supports student success and is inclusive in its practices. Inclusive schooling practices are evidenced when amongst other things:

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*Well being of all members of the school community is at the forefront of the school culture; young people are empowered and valued; there is a culture of independence within a safe and secure learning environment; difference and diversity are respected as a resource and curriculum topics are connected with the young persons' interests and lives (South Australian Social Inclusion Board 2007:18).*

Good leadership also provides support for intelligent risk-taking allowing innovative approaches to be tested and learning to occur from failure. Polesel, Helme, Davies, Teese, Nicholas and Vickers (2004) found that the development of good programs invariably depended upon attitudinal change amongst teachers, support staff and the broader school community and structural change in the way schools operated to meet the particular needs of vocational programs and the students that undertook them. Critical in achieving these changes, were supportive educational leadership and a whole-of-school view that VET was both a positive and appropriate pathway for many students.

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## APPENDIX 2: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL AND QUESTION SCHEDULE

*Introductions and explanation of the focus and intent of the research – 20 minutes*

Timing	Questions	Ask the group to think about [prompts]
20 minutes	<p><b>For all:</b></p> <p>I'd like to ask you some questions about this vocational program and how it works <i>(then move on to questions below)</i></p>	
	<p><b>For teachers:</b></p> <p>What does this program consist of?</p> <p>How is it structured, delivered, assessed?</p>	<p><i>Content</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mix of vocational skills, general education, work placements, industry visits, LLN, personal skills, employability skills, career advice</li> </ul> <p><i>Students</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Intended target groups</li> <li>- Participation by students other than the target group</li> <li>- Strategies for eliciting student expectations/motivation</li> </ul> <p><i>Certification</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nationally accredited or not</li> <li>- Certification available and through whom</li> </ul>
	<p><b>For support staff:</b></p> <p>In broad terms, what sort of support is in place for this program and what is the philosophy that underpins that support?</p>	<p><i>Policy relating to support</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For students</li> <li>- For teachers</li> </ul> <p><i>Philosophy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What shapes the thinking within the school/college</li> <li>- How is this philosophy transmitted to students</li> <li>- How is the philosophy transmitted to other staff, the community, including industry</li> </ul>
	<p><b>For external stakeholders:</b></p> <p>What is your involvement with this program, its students/teachers?</p> <p>How and for what purpose did this relationship come about?</p>	<p><i>Roles and responsibilities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Type of activity</li> <li>- Organisations represented</li> <li>- Focus of relationship –what is desired outcome from the involvement</li> <li>- Extent of commitment – short term/long term</li> </ul>
30 minutes	<p><b>For teachers:</b></p> <p>How would you describe your approach to teaching and learning in the program?</p> <p>What approaches appear to work well and which are less successful with the cohorts of students that undertake the program?</p> <p>What evidence do you have that this is the</p>	<p><i>Pedagogical approaches (words that best describe?)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Applied, experiential, work-related</li> <li>- Collaborative and negotiated</li> <li>- Description and degree of flexibility/timetabling/attendance/modes of delivery</li> <li>- Extent of student-focus/individual/personalised</li> <li>- Importance/value of vocational focus</li> </ul>

	<p>case?</p>	<p><i>Expectations placed on students</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attendance, behaviour, learning contracts, negotiation processes</li> </ul> <p><i>Measures of success</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What counts as success</li> </ul>
	<p><b>For support staff:</b></p> <p>How do the various elements of support work and who makes decisions about who gets what support and when?</p>	<p><i>Process and practice</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Range of support strategies in place and how they work together (if they do)</li> <li>- Decision-making processes</li> <li>- Expectations that are placed on staff and their effectiveness</li> <li>- Importance/value of vocational focus</li> </ul> <p><i>Measures of success</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What counts as success</li> </ul>
	<p><b>For external stakeholders:</b></p> <p>Within your knowledge, what do you consider the major value of vocational programs for students 15 to 19 years old?</p>	<p><i>Value/importance of vocational focus</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educational, social, economic, other</li> </ul> <p><i>Measures of success</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What counts as success</li> <li>- Evidence of success</li> </ul>
<p><b>30 minutes</b></p>	<p><b>For all:</b></p> <p>Now a question on retention. Retention to Year 12 or its equivalent and successful transition to work or further study has become a key policy for Australian governments.</p> <p>What do you think are the key features of this program that encourage young people to remain in education and training?</p>	
	<p><b>For teachers:</b></p> <p>What strategies do you use to retain and help transition to further study or work? Which of these strategies work well?</p> <p>What evidence do you have of this?</p> <p>What gets in the way of successful retention and transition?</p>	<p><i>Transition partnerships/relationships</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Role of stakeholders: industry, employers, community agencies, other education/training providers</li> </ul> <p><i>Transition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Processes/pathways exist for transition</li> <li>- What, how and with whom have these been developed</li> <li>- Formal agreements, informal agreements including evidence of the benefits to students of these arrangements</li> <li>- Information, advice and career counselling linkages</li> </ul> <p><i>Barriers to success</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal to the program (structure/content/resourcing etc)</li> <li>- Internal to the organisation (policy/processes)</li> <li>- Resourcing issues</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p>

		- Those overcome and those still to be won
	<p><b>For support staff:</b></p> <p>What aspects of the program do you think are critical to assisting young people to enter the workforce or take on further education or training?</p> <p>What gets in the way of successful retention and transition?</p>	<p><i>Support mechanisms</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Policy, processes and practices (identification of at risk, monitoring)</li> <li>- Extent of integration</li> <li>- Information, advice and career counselling linkages</li> </ul> <p><i>Supportive partnerships/relationships</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What, how and with whom have these been developed</li> <li>- Role of other stakeholders in supporting students and teachers involved in the program(s)</li> </ul> <p><i>Barriers to success</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As for teachers</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As for teachers</li> </ul>
	<p><b>For external stakeholders:</b></p> <p>What aspects of the program do you think are critical in assisting young people to enter the workforce or take on further education and training?</p>	
<b>30 minutes</b>	<p><b>For all:</b></p> <p>Research suggests that a supportive school/college culture is critical in raising levels of student engagement and completion. Do you agree with this statement?</p>	
	<p><b>For teachers and support staff:</b></p> <p>What are the features of your organisation – its structures and culture – which support the achievement of positive program outcomes?</p>	<p><i>Support mechanisms</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Early identification, intervention and monitoring strategies for at risk students</li> <li>- Specific support roles (internal &amp; external) and strategies for working with teaching staff</li> <li>- Mentoring, social activities, peer support and other student-centred activities etc.</li> </ul> <p><i>Culture, including leadership</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mission, values strategic direction, cultural artefacts supporting program intent</li> <li>- Communication approaches – students, teachers, community, industry</li> <li>- Commitment to quality and quality outcomes</li> <li>- Relationships with key stakeholders including industry</li> <li>- Linkages with the broader community</li> <li>- Factors that make this program successful and distinctive (if relevant)</li> </ul> <p><i>Key characteristics of the program</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Curriculum</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality of teaching</li> <li>- Quality and extent of support</li> <li>- Industry linkage</li> <li>- Facilities and resourcing</li> </ul>
	<p><b>For external stakeholders:</b></p> <p>What is it about this vocational program that makes it effective in keeping young people engaged in education and training?</p>	<p><i>Key characteristics of the program</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Curriculum</li> <li>- Quality of teaching</li> <li>- Quality and extent of support</li> <li>- Industry linkage</li> <li>- Facilities and resourcing</li> </ul>
<b>15 minutes</b>	<p><b>For all:</b></p> <p>If you were in a position to make changes to the program content or the way you are delivering it, what changes would you make and why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Addressing the challenges previously identified together with other aspects</li> </ul>
<b>15 minutes</b>	<p><b>For all:</b></p> <p>Do you have any other comments?</p> <p><i>Ask if there are any sources of data available</i></p>	<p><i>Confirmation of data and other publicly available information sources to support write up of case study.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Curriculum</li> <li>- Vocational program information</li> <li>- Documents that set out roles and responsibilities, processes, learning contracts etc.</li> <li>- Completions data: unit of competency completions, qualifications, certification</li> <li>- Pathways agreements and data relating to transition</li> <li>- Any other data, information that is relevant to the nominated program(s)</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX 3: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS - SUPPORT STAFF AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

The following table sets out the roles and functions of support staff and external stakeholders participating in each of the focus groups conducted in the study.

Organisation	Support staff	External stakeholders
1 Adelaide Hills Vocational College		Youth Development Officer, Mt Barker Council, Transition Broker, School & Beyond, Youth Project manager, Adelaide Hills Community Health Centre
2a Canberra Institute of Technology: Bruce campus	Access team Coordinator, CIT; Education Manager, Vocational College; head of Counselling and Equity, CIT; Student Advisor, Vocational College; Admin Support officer; CIT Youth Advisor	CIT Tourism and Hospitality management; Coordinator, Language, Literacy and Numeracy programs, CIT; school-business community partnership program, ACT Chamber of Commerce & Industry; Manager of Student Support, Dept of Education
2b Canberra Institute of Technology: Southside Campus	Educational Support officer; 2 YARDS student advisors; CIT Career Advisor; CIT Student Advice officer; Indigenous Students Coordinator	Office of Engagement, Uni of Canberra; New Partnership Broker and Brokerage Advisor, ACT Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Education Manager, Centre for Community Health & Wellbeing, CIT
3 Challenger TAFE		Psychologist from Schools for Isolated and Distance Ed; youth mentor from Dept of Corrective Services; Participation Coordinator, Dept of Education; Manager for Participation, Fremantle District, Dept of Education; Community Youth Worker, City of Coburn
4 Copperfield College	VCAL Coordinator	
5 Holmesglen TAFE	Welfare and careers counsellors; VCAL coordinator; Industry & Work Skills Co-ordinator	Vocational College: Hospitality manager; electrical teacher
6a North Coast Institute of TAFE: Coffs Harbour	VET in Schools Coordinator, North Coast TAFE; Outreach Coordinator for TAFE Coffs Harbour & Multicultural Contact; Outreach Coordinator Macksville	Partnership Broker, North Coast Youth Career Connections; Manager, North Coast Youth Career Connections; Careers Advisor; Coffs Harbour Senior College
6b North Coast Institute of TAFE: Kingscliff	Team leader and project officer, Aboriginal Learners Support Services, North Coast TAFE; VET School consultant, North Coast TAFE	VET schools coordinator, North Coast TAFE; North Coast TAFE Arts & Media Faculty representative; Relieving director, General Education Faculty
7 Oakey Senior High School	Vocational projects officer, PR Officer, Teacher Aide	Construction Skills Qld mentor; Busy at Work Apprenticeship Services; Mission Australia Apprenticeship Services.
8 Padbury High School	1 (Manager, School Programs, Sydney Institute)	Manager Participation, Dept of Education
9a Sydney Institute of TAFE	Manager, Schools programs	TVET Institute Consultant
9b Sydney Institute of TAFE		Deputy Principal, Georges River College; workforce planner from Ramsey Health Care; Education & Recruitment Mgr, St George Private Hospital

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