Engaging Youth in Vocational Skills - Collaborative Partnerships
a Perspective from Chisholm Institute

The Challenge
The challenge facing vocational education and training is to discover the most effective way to engage youth in vocational skills, both those engaged at school or TAFE who may be at risk of dropping out, as well as those already disengaged for a variety of reasons. It is important to explore and develop a range of models that can be developed in a collaborative way between educational providers as well as within organisations where collaboration is needed across vocational, bridging skill areas and support staff.

Chisholm Institute’s Response: Models and Case Studies
Chisholm Institute is located in the south east growth corridor of Victoria. Of its 37,936 student enrolments over 8,000 are students under 20 years of age with this cohort making up 21% of the Institute’s student enrolments. As a result the Institute has had to focus on youth transition.

Chisholm has a strong history of collaboration with schools in the region, delivering VET in Schools programs, VCE, VCAL and school-based apprenticeship programs to 84 schools across the South East.

This paper outlines four case studies that use different models to engage and re-engage youth aimed at improving the participation and success rate of youth in VET. The paper briefly outlines each model and then summarises the issues and challenges encountered.

Why do we need to keep youth engaged?
- It is Government policy and a strategic imperative in South East Victoria given the number of young people in the region.
- Research indicates that boosting the proportion of young people completing school or an apprenticeship to 90% would increase workforce numbers by 65,000, boost economic productivity and expand the economy by more than $9 million by 2040. Also, the higher the qualification level, the more success in entering and remaining in the workforce.
- VET participation increases personal individual success, instils the beginning of a journey of lifelong learning and contributes to regional economic performance.
- There is an opportunity for involvement and commitment of not only educational providers but industry, community and government to work in a seamless and collaborative way.
- We have social and community responsibility.
- There is no alternative.

Model One: The Berwick TEC at Chisholm
The Berwick Technical Education Centre (TEC) is an exciting State Government initiative to provide vocationally focused courses in state-of-the-art facilities for 16-20 year old students who have not completed Year 12. Courses offered at the Berwick TEC include the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), Pre-apprenticeships, stand alone certificates, VET in schools (VETiS) and specialist VCE subjects. The TEC facility provides both a ‘home-base’ for students and an adult learning environment with vocational training facilities in high skills shortage areas such as building & construction, plumbing, electrical, children’s services, health and nursing within a single, integrated training complex. The new Berwick TEC building has begun construction and will open in 2009. The Pilot Berwick TEC has commenced and in the interim is utilising existing Berwick and other campus facilities.

Features
- Stand alone and partnership options across pre-apprenticeships, full intermediate and senior VCAL programs and VETiS skill shortage areas for 16 -20 year old youth, who are in schools, need an alternative or are not engaged in education.
- VCAL programs offered as one seamless program with integrated learning and assessment and Information Communication Technologies (ICT) across all four VCAL strands including a full prevocational or pre-apprenticeship qualification as well as development of new approaches to existing standalone pre-apprenticeships in skill shortage areas.
• Strong links through the Lead Partner Model with local schools and for industry involvement in delivery, work placement and mentoring.
• Guaranteed pathways for graduates through Chisholm courses and apprenticeships.
• Development of an e-portfolio linked to the credit matrix for each student.
• An applied learning focus which embraces technology and takes place in simulated learning spaces (e.g. in the health stream a high tech simulation clinical acute area, general fluid learning spaces in the workplace and through community projects).
• A unique aspect of the TEC is the simulated building site where all trades work together in a collaborative, flexible and timely manner, within a single space, so students gain a realistic experience of a multi-trade environment.
• Strong use of ICT for learning, communication and social interaction.
• Project focused, problem based, scenario based are integrated across learning e.g. VCAL general and vocational specific streams with strong links to industry and community.
• Emphasis on group and individual learning.
• Range of support strategies linked to a whole of education experience: mentoring, campus life, personal and essential/employability skills development.
• Collaborative partnerships and active networks with schools, industry, local businesses, community service organisations, the Lead Partner School initiative and key agencies e.g. South East Local Learning and Employment Network (SELLEN).

Philosophy
The central philosophy is to offer responsive, integrated, experiential and applied learning approaches to students in the 16-19 age range who seek an introduction to vocational education and training options in an adult learning setting. The setting takes into account the developmental needs of students going from adolescence to adulthood. Given the age of students a significant focus is placed upon the shift, and the struggles involved in that shift, from relative dependence to relative independence as sought by students themselves and those who support them.

A significant outcome is the students’ ability to plan, map and fulfil learning and employment journeys, improved life and basic education skills and in particular, skills to manage the setbacks and advantages encountered. The educational model is built on initially identifying the desired student outcomes and then determining how the outcomes can be achieved. This includes measures to overcome challenges that may inhibit successful outcomes.

Approach
Given Berwick TEC is a greenfield site, it has afforded Chisholm an opportunity to apply lessons learnt from all youth and programs that have been delivered at Chisholm, looking at existing VCAL delivery, VETiS and apply the learning from those existing programs to the development of an educational delivery model that best meets the individual needs of young students.

The TEC was set up to attract young people to undertake training and education in vocational areas that address skill shortages and provide them with career, employment and pathway options. All courses offered at the TEC provide defined pathways to either employment or further study. Each student receives individual support with careers and pathways planning and access to specialist services during their time at the Berwick TEC. Students will at all times understand their current position within their pathway map together with any alternative options that are possible.

The programs include VCAL, either themed or term rotations around industry areas, for students who are unsure of the specific vocational area they wish to pursue. VCAL offers a year eleven or twelve equivalent which is appealing to many potential students and their parents. There are other students who are clearer about their vocational direction, for whom this is not an important factor and who would prefer to take the more traditional and direct pathway to an apprenticeship. The Berwick TEC caters for both groups; it aims to attract a range of students from the disengaged, to those who would prefer a different educational setting or environment or those who are attracted by the delivery that will be offered. In addition, it offers stand alone pre-apprenticeship or pre-vocational studies as well. VETiS will be offered in partnership with schools.
The program delivery takes place using an ICT-rich platform to complement the digital native generation of learners. This supports a range of different learning styles and provides a sophisticated pedagogical repertoire to maximise learner engagement. Individualised learning is a priority at the TEC, where students are supported, to become independent learners and develop skills that allow them to successfully manage their own learning. All levels of the TEC experience are focussed on providing students with a competitive edge in transitioning into the workplace and becoming valued members of the community. Classes generally focus on project-based learning in a "world-of-work" environment to simulate the workplace.

The Berwick TEC is developing strong links with industry for both staff and students. Staff have current industry skills and knowledge to ensure the curriculum is responsive to the needs of industry and to improve job prospects for students. Students will benefit from the industry partnerships by gaining relevant work placement to further develop their technical and employability skills.

Key work has focused on
- Integration of learning, assessment and delivery strategies to create seamless programs.
- Establishment of key staff roles, skills and expectations.
- Review of key processes (student selection and support strategies).
- Collaboration with local schools - The Lead Partner School Model.
- Connection with industry and community.

Staff - A Key Success Factor
The critical component of TEC success relates directly to the selection of staff. TEC staff must support an integrated delivery model, understand and enjoy working with young people, be prepared to question and change traditional delivery practices and use ICT extensively to aid in the engagement of young people in learning. Currently TEC staff are developing applied learning activities for each VCAL industry stream that achieves competency outcomes in both vocational and non-vocational components of the course in progress. The aim is to fully integrate all VCAL streams to maximise learning by making clear the relationship between training and employment.

Collaboration with Local Schools - The Lead Partner School Model
As a result of the strength of schools surrounding the TEC in VETiS and VCAL delivery and being cognisant of the need for collaboration with schools and be seen as partner and not a competitive, Chisholm undertook significant consultation and developed a Communication Strategy in the development phase of the TEC. The extensive consultation process was undertaken with schools, young people in schools and VET organisations, disengaged youth, industry, local government, regional and state government authorities. A key initiative that resulted from this process is the concept of a Lead Partner School model.

The Lead Partner School concept focuses on complementing rather than duplicating existing regional provision, identifying the current program provision and establishing an integrated approach between the schools and the Berwick TEC for mutual benefit in both the delivery and range of vocational training alternatives offered within the local area. Through continued consultation, the TEC will complement and be complemented by education providers in a regional provision strategy rather than operating in isolation. Formation of partnerships for mutual benefit between the TEC and the local educational community continues to grow.

Chisholm has developed a model outlining areas of collaboration associated with the Lead Partner concept which will form the basis of productive long term relationships with school despite some funding and logistical challenges. These are:
- Joint Curriculum Selection and Pathways Development.
- Shared Teacher Delivery and Professional Development.
- Joint Resource Planning (Physical).
- Coordinated Industry Placement.
- Shared Staffing Arrangements.
- Joint Program Provision Plan.
- Career Planning Pathways.
Model Two VET IN VCE Partnership Chisholm and Narre Warren South P12

In 2006 Chisholm and Narre Warren South P-12 began dialogue about strengthening their relationship with a view to establishing a partnership with potential feeder schools and pathways into health skill shortage areas. The concept of a pilot in allied health was developed as a new offering within the VETIS cluster in the region, with Narre Warren South taking the lead role. It was planned to then provide a vocational pathway into the new and emerging roles of Certificate IV in Allied Health Assistance to meet future job opportunities.

There were three drivers for the program:
- There was no VET in the VCE programs in the area of allied health.
- The Government released funding for secondary schools to set up skills centres. Narre Warren South P-12 College intended to apply for funding to set up a Health Skills Centre. They approached Chisholm to assist them in this application.
- An aging population and population growth with associated increase in demand for care programs and for allied health workers. The region in which the TAFE and school operates has one of the largest and growing number of health and aged facilities in Victoria. There is also potential for young people to move into developing roles in the area of care.

The program delivers a Certificate III over two years to senior secondary students from Narre Warren South P-12 and other schools. The structure of the program is for the host school, Narre Warren P-12 College, to provide the generic elements of the program with material prepared by Chisholm, to students at the school. Industry specific training is provided at Chisholm by fully qualified allied health professionals, physiotherapists and occupational therapists at one of its campuses. This approach assists with the costs. The program includes theory and practice as well as rehabilitation and life skills. Chisholm has developed a fully operational kitchen and shower facilities in the nursing laboratory to provide practical experience. A more general set of equipment is available at the Narre Warren South P-12 College site. In order to ensure the success and quality of the program, Chisholm plays a key role in providing assistance through materials, resources and advice.

If the VETIS students successfully complete the program, they are guaranteed a place at Chisholm in the Certificate IV Allied Health Assistants program. That is, the program leads to a vocational outcome with three years VET training (the normal duration is one year). The extra duration provides greater experience than for other groups, which assists in overcoming industry concerns regarding their youth.

Those students who wish to go onto the Certificate IV program are required to have prerequisite units. Chisholm has catered for this through a course on Saturdays and Tuesday evenings, which they offered to the school students. In the pilot group around half of the group took up this option.

The challenge for Chisholm is to manage this team, which does not meet together in a physical location. A project leader co-ordinates the program ‘at a distance’. This is one of the distinguishing features of the program – virtual management. The coordinator’s role is to provide frameworks, structures and information for delivery staff. This is achieved through emails and phone calls as there is not a common workplace. This has presented challenges. It has also been critical for moderation across the two sectors to reach consensus on assessment and delivery.

Outcomes
- New offering within the VETIS suite in the region.
- New pathways for youth in the SE of Melbourne with the option of Certificate IV at Chisholm.
- New entrants into an area of skill shortage in the Health sector.

BENEFITS

Students
- Gain skills and knowledge for a pathway into allied health.
- Training in state of the art facilities part of the Berwick TEC high tech simulation and rehabilitation/clinical areas.
- Gain a new pathway in the Health sector that is not usually available to young students.
- Gain a longer duration of training and experience that should assist their career pathways in the industry.
Schools
- Lead this area in the VETiS cluster and opens options for students across twenty schools and has grown with two groups operating in 2008.
- Staff skill development in VET.
- Shared program expertise and development of new ideas.
- Participation in Chisholm VET professional development activities.

Chisholm
- Develops strong relationships with secondary schools in the region and gains a new market.
- Gains new expert staff expertise that would not normally be available to deliver programs.
- Gains the benefit of expert views for contextualisation of training and assessment, which ensures industry relevance and application to other areas.

Community
- Opened up VET training options to meet industry need.
- Industry involved in program staff and facilities.
- Led to dialogue with local government about a three way partnership for training and employment.

Lessons learnt for a successful partnership
- Regular face-to-face communication is important in managing risks.
- Virtual management is a feasible strategy in exploratory programs even in the establishment phase.
- Lines of reporting and collaborative planning must be clearly outlined and managed. You cannot assume that each partner has the same view of implementation.
- Regular moderation between Chisholm and the school is critical for consistency and professional development.

Through collaborative planning processes the program could be expanded to other areas such as the Certificate III in Home and Community Care. We are now exploring this within Berwick Technical College in partnership with schools. This would address the growth in demand for workers that arises from policies to maintain people in the home for longer.

If you are thinking of doing this you need to:
- Have a person who is a communication hub (preferably the manager).
- Attract staff with specialist knowledge in the field and who wish to enthuse youth into the industry area.
- Have clear and agreed communication processes with partners.
- Work collaboratively with partners to ensure that communication occurs and that problems are readily identified and managed.
- Ensure that industry experts understand both the secondary and VET school environment.
- Look at managing quality and program integrity and costs.
- Develop a succession plan to manage risks of losing key industry staff.

Model Three: Using Mobile Phone Technology to Enhance Learning for Youth in VETiS, Pre-apprenticeships and Apprenticeships

Background
The mobile phone has become a convergence of devices, resulting in a powerful multi media tool. The trend towards self publishing and self content creation is evident via the rise in You Tube, My Space and Facebook.

Utilising the successes of our past research to create a platform for self publication, the project at Chisholm focuses on the leaner content being created by the learner. The impact of these technologies on the learner is the ability to create and share objects of interest, or learning objects that occur wherever the learner is, be it the classroom, the workplace or in life. This not only ensures the resource content relevance to the intended audience but is considerate of generational differences. The resources and tasks are developed by the same generation who will use them. The teacher is also able to utilize these resources with other theoretical and instructional classes, again giving greater relevance and can be used to complement Chisholm Institute’s existing learning resources.
The Chisholm Building and Construction Department educational project model (Carroll, R, 2007).

The model recognises the need to create an implicit Curriculum, a culture of learning and exploration that is responsive to the possibility of “something happening” when students interact with each other and with the teacher (Morris, R, 2000).

The delivery at Chisholm for its Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) and now more broadly for its pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, uses:

- Moblog to create a positive social culture which in turns enhances learning through the social network created.
- The Moblog platform also provides for the inclusion of third party evidence. The third party evidence gained via the employer/supervisor videoing the student carrying out a task and adding audio commentary, negating the need for written reports. Validation is also addressed via the visual image of the actual student doing the actual work. This image can be checked via student record photographs.

The ability for the teacher, assessor, employers, students and even parents and friends to be able to visit this learning environment allows for social dialogue, recognition of employer input into training, acknowledgement of student achievements, and gives friends and family an insight into the students work environment, giving greater understanding of the stresses and rewards of a career in this field. This site is able to be accessed via an internet connected computer or internet enabled mobile phone, providing anytime access to view photos and video, view comments, add comments, all in a mobile context. The cost of accessing the site is quite inexpensive at approximately 12 to 16 cents to open the page. Adding comment is a further 12 to 16 cents. The ability to add comment provides feedback to the student on their work processes, and is shared collaboratively via fellow student access to picture and comment, giving added context to the written comment. All participants then learn from the one experience.

This project provides for employer/supervisor participation. This inclusion into the education process not only creates opportunities for the employer to be more involved, more aware of what we do, but also provides the employer/supervisor with recognition of their role in the training. The employer/supervisor also gains by participative inclusion in the learning via enhanced ITC skills that will translate into a higher skilled workplace, meeting the challenges of an economy driven by innovation.
Further development to the on-site or workplace learning and assessment program is content delivery to mobile devices. This has been successfully used with apprentices. The ability to create information, carry out self assessment and have log-in scored formal assessment accessible via mobile device creates a whole of learning environment whilst the learner is in the workplace. Mobile technology has the capacity to support the learning and the learner in the workplace, not just the assessment. Staff have created a set of online learning resources accessible via mobile device. This is enhanced by the ability to webcast events live via mobile device. This is being trialled with critical aspects of instruction being filmed utilising software installed on a mobile phone. The system notifies a selected group, in this case the on-site or workplace students, who are then able to see the instruction real time via mobile device or computer, with an option to view the archive at a later more convenient time. Our youth students (VETiS) currently utilise this and picture technology to relay contextual information back to the Institute. This allows for specific contextual content to be viewed, discussed and reflected upon, either collaboratively or individually, enabling learning and knowledge construction.

VETiS teachers have been supplied with mobile phones that are supported with the required software technology for students to utilise in the classroom and workshop/simulated workplace environment. This gives the students guidance on how to implement this technology and gives them guided practice with no cost outlay. This cost is borne by the Institute with the current billing averaging at @ $20.00 per mobile phone per month. Students use these phones to take photos and videos of their individual and/or group projects and can use Bluetooth technology to transfer to their own phone. The students are given the contact details of each of these phones and the students relay SMS text information to the teacher. This information can be class attendance, be a request or seek clarification. The teachers average 10-12 messages per evening from students. The parents are given this contact number as well but are reminded that discussions are only ½ hour prior to class commencement unless urgent. We have an average of two parents per class ringing the mobile phone to discuss issues/progress with the individual teacher. The teacher uses mobile technology to instigate response. This may be a simple reminder of the class project for the week, or what equipment the student will need to bring. This generation will always open a text message. The students, parents and teachers have all acted responsibly in utilising mobile technology with no reports of misuse, bullying or damage. This technology has provided a simple platform for inclusion of all parties in the learning environment.

Conclusion

The current convergence of technology has created a generation who can access almost unlimited forms of information, allowing for contextual and relevant content choices to be in the hands of the learner. This way of engaging youth reinforces that this generation is in a transitional stage to becoming what may well be called “The Mobile Generation”, having moved on from the digital generation with the new paradigm being driven by the need for personalisation and self created content, regardless of time or place, blending perfectly into workplace and informal learning practices. In time, the teacher’s control of the content will diminish, giving the learner the freedom and the mobility to discover, interact and create new content. The new teacher will be seen as a navigator, guiding the student’s direction, choices and knowledge creation whilst respecting the authority and judgement that is embedded within the professional practice of teaching. The completion rate in the programs using this approach with youth has been high with positive feedback from schools, parents and the students.

Model Four - Xpress

Given the low participation rates in education on the Mornington Peninsula, the Institute through its campus at Rosebud has worked in partnership with schools to look at ways of retaining students who are about to drop out of school. The result is the Xpress program aimed at 15-19 year old youth. The course first ran in 2004 at Chisholm Rosebud and grew from the need for students in the local area to access a school alternative. School careers staff worked closely with Chisholm staff to develop the concept. The schools involved suspend enrolments for the duration of the program and they enter TAFE. The program aims to provide the students with a range of life and vocational skills under the banner of a Certificate I in Vocational Preparation as a means to re-engage individuals in learning. The course runs for a term at a time (usually 10 weeks) in Terms 2, 3 and 4 of each year with the hope that at the end the student will return to school or continue a pathway at TAFE.

The course combines a personal development aspect (through subjects such as Personal Effectiveness, Teamwork Skills and Drug and Alcohol Education) with a focus upon future directions and options relating to re-engagement in education or work. The course aims to have students be more aware of themselves and others, and aware of their future options, whether they are planning to return to school, enter a TAFE course, an apprenticeship or find full time employment. It also offers work related and short employment competencies e.g. food handling.
The course is organic and is designed to change with the growing needs of the youth in the community. It is unlike other youth courses due to its flexibility in design and length. Students look at the issues of risk, specifically relating to drugs and alcohol, road safety and first aid as a means to recognise behaviour that limits future options. Key community agencies are involved in the program such as the Education Foundation. Programs such as “R U MAD” aimed at connecting the youth with their community. Chisholm has developed strong links with a number of local allied health services that provides expertise in issues relating to youth health, and risk. Partnerships with The Peninsula Community Health Services, and Rosebud Youth Services, provide a wider source of expertise that may be needed to assist students in developing skill sets to promote positive decision making.

The program also enlists the services of Chisholm Youth Pathways personnel and Student Advisory Services counsellors to add an additional support mechanism.

There is a key contact nominated in the school who regularly communicates with the TAFE link on the student’s progress. They need meet to discuss the next step in their re-engagement journey. The majority of students re-engage by returning to school, going on to a vocational program usually at the prevocational level or some have begun an apprenticeship.

What has made these models for engaging youth in VET work?

- Sharing the same starting point and values – what is best for young people.
- Appropriate staff selection with an emphasis on inspirational teaching and commitment to youth and who recognise change is about developing delivery that is appropriate for the generational needs of youth.
- Choice of experiences, models, learning options and tools within a program i.e. making the delivery different through project-based/scenario/simulated teaching methodology, use of ICT and innovative physical spaces.
- Approaches that make the learning experience relevant, incorporate the learning styles and generational needs of the student cohort, enable youth to have input into learning, lead activities and develop a range of essential and employability skills associated with this process.
- Programs that recognise the importance of relationships and collaborative interactions student-student, students-staff, staff-staff.
- Use of appropriate technologies both electronic and others in all facets or program delivery and communication.
- Partnerships with the local education community that are built based on trust and willingness to make them work, sharing of delivery, expertise and resources yet maintaining program integrity and outcomes.
- Strong connection with local industry and involvement.

What are the challenges?

- Sustainability of the models and the capacity to expand the models across the local region.
- Links with employers needs to be strong as well as with key local agencies.
- Lack of industry support for some pre-apprenticeship courses in terms of discouraging work placement for young people. e.g. Electrical industry and Plumbing in Victoria.
- Limitations in the scope of training packages to provide a meaningful industry experience.
- Lack of support and knowledge of VCAL within both industry and the wider community as a vehicle to gain high-level industry specific skills.
- Lack of industry support in providing work placement for young people.
- Pathway advice contrary to the needs of the individual student.
- Restrictions on partnerships with schools due to funding arrangements across sectors.
- Capacity to share resources and staff across independent educational sectors and fully implement models e.g. Lead Partner concept.
- Recognition that collaborative models are resource intensive.
- Costs associated with new technologies and equipment.
- At risk youth need appropriately skilled teaching and support staff and effective processes in place.
- Trust and co-operation across partners.
- Access issues related to costs of VETiS and cross sectoral barriers.
- Cater for both engaged youth i.e. VETiS as a preventative approach and those not engaged as a type of corrective strategy.