

# Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training



**Independent Schools Queensland response to the  
*Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work,  
Further Education and Training* – December 2019**

## Introduction

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training*.

Independent Schools Queensland is the peak body representing and advocating on behalf of over 220 independent schools across Queensland. Each independent school has its own governing body and is responsible for meeting government accountabilities and delivering educational programs to students.

Independent schools in Queensland are characterised by diversity. The sector includes large metropolitan single sex colleges as well as small rural co-educational P - 12 schools. Some schools are based on particular religious, philosophical and / or pedagogical approaches while others cater for specific groups of students. Some independent schools in Queensland are primarily for Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, while others have Indigenous students from remote communities as boarders.

This response was developed in the following ways:

- Officers within ISQ were requested to provide their feedback based on areas of expertise such as students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, Vocational Education and Training (VET), international education and curriculum;
- Officers within ISQ also requested advice from targeted groups of school leaders across the sector including Principals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools, leaders in boarding schools and leaders in remote schools; and
- Comments were collated into the five key themes and a final response was developed.

## Background

Independent schools in Queensland are characterised by diversity, however one common feature is the genuine commitment by all schools to developing curriculum offerings that are appropriate, challenging and high quality, which reflect the values-base of the school and provide the best possible educational outcomes for their students. Independent schools in Queensland are strongly committed to providing students with as many viable pathways to future success post-school as possible.

Any discussion of pathways from senior secondary education to work, further education and training needs to acknowledge the curriculum foundation occurring in P – Year 12. Independent schools in Queensland are required to implement the Australian Curriculum (or other recognised ACARA curricula) for Years P – 10, followed by the senior syllabuses of the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (or other nationally agreed and accredited offerings such as VET) for Years 11 – 12.

Simultaneously, ISQ is aware of the explicit focus of this review on opportunities and outcomes for students who are disadvantaged, have a disability, those in regional, rural and remote areas and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Currently, the profile of our 220 member schools is as follows:

- 41,000 students – 16,800 Primary School students; 24,200 Secondary School students
- 5,048 state funded students with a disability
- 9 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tier 1 schools (i.e. schools with 50% or greater Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander enrolments)
- 34 Boarding Schools
- 30 Boarding Schools with Indigenous students
- 19 Special Assistance Schools (SAS) with an additional 14 campuses
- VET offerings:
  - 155 Independent Schools offer VET to students through TAFE Queensland, Private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), school RTOs and school-based traineeships or apprenticeships (SATs)
  - 39 QCAA registered school RTOs
  - 1 ASQA registered school RTO
  - Christian Community Ministries – ASQA registered RTO for 6 independent schools

*Independent Schools Queensland believe we are well informed to contribute to the 2019 Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training owing to the broad range of students enrolled within our sector.*

In recent years, there has been significant research and inquiry into senior secondary pathways and transitions to the post Year 12 destinations of work, further education and / or training. Common themes are evident in the findings, and recommendations have the potential to bring about the best possible outcomes for all young people, regardless of career aspirations or personal circumstance.

The implementation of these recommendations within secondary schools is, however, consistently impeded by recurring challenges, including:

1. Career Advisors – insufficient access to time, tools and training,
2. An overcrowded curriculum,
3. A common perception that university is the best post-school destination, and
4. Contextual issues – geographical location.

If every young person is to be supported in a decision-making process that results in smooth transition to post-school destinations, there is urgent need for solutions to these challenges.

**Skills:** what are the essential skills, knowledge and capabilities students should expect to leave senior secondary schooling with to help them succeed in their post-school lives?

**1. What does success at the end of Year 12 look like for students, for education systems, for industry and the community?**

Success for students at the end of 13 years of schooling is currently defined at least in part by the *Melbourne Declaration* through Goal 2:

“All young Australians become:

- Successful learners
- Confident and creative individuals
- Active and informed citizens”.

This goal is often encapsulated in a school’s ethos and mission. The following selection illustrates the similarities and differences in graduate qualities favoured by independent schools.

**Kings Christian College** - *King's champions students in growing their leadership potential, contributing to school culture and building meaningful relationships...*

**Brisbane Boys' College** – *[boys who are] confident can move forward, stride into the future and cope with change.... to cultivate positivity within themselves, their community and our natural world*

**Kairos College** - *engage in meaningful work and leisure and that increase their capacity for resilience and wellbeing in their personal lives, relationships, families and communities*

**Hillbrook Anglican College** - *develop students who are: compassionate, ethical and creative thinkers with a sense of curiosity, wonder and hope; able to demonstrate core academic knowledge and skills; prepared for a productive, fulfilling, well-balanced life; appreciative of their own and others spirituality, and culturally and globally active*

**Immanuel Lutheran College** - *a love of learning that will allow students to become lifelong learners, complex and creative thinkers, effective communicators and active investigators*

The similarities are about schools wanting young people who will graduate schooling with a sense of:

- Accomplishment, achievement and fulfilment with their schooling outcomes,
- Being ready for the next steps – through multiple pathways to university, TAFE or further studies offered by other providers in the VET sector, work and entrepreneurial enterprises, and
- Being resilient, optimistic, participatory, productive, and contributing to a better community and world.

The differences tend to be about how particular attributes are nuanced, depending on the philosophical base of the school.

Once it is known what qualities schools want to instil in their senior students, then the necessary skills required to develop those qualities may be defined.

## 2. What are the foundational skills essential for all students for all pathways, including further study, employment or starting a business?

In 2018, the *Unique individuals, broad skills: inquiry into school to work transition* report noted literacy, digital literacy and numeracy skills as the foundation for all careers, in addition to 'soft skills'. The inquiry recommended the incorporation of these skills in the school curriculum to better prepare students for post school education, training and work, and meet the increasing demands of employers across most industries. In recent years, the Foundation for Young Australians noted employer requirements have shifted from technical or 'hard skills' to the need for young people to have skills in areas such as problem-solving, communication, self-motivation, initiative, team management and listening.

A robust approach to overcoming challenges through new and innovative ways of thinking, educating and acting may be achieved through:

- Re-branding terminology to raise the status of 'soft skills': Language plays a significant role in the overall perception students, parents and the broader community form about the importance of skills for work and as such, a re-branding of terminology to overcome negative connotations is required. Re-branding must consider and consolidate the plethora of terms used over the last decade from employability, transferable, 21<sup>st</sup> Century and enterprise skills, to Core Skills for Work and Foundation Skills in nationally accredited training packages, and general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum.
- Inclusive practices that value and recognise work skills alongside traditional 'academic' learning: Prioritise skills for work through the development of micro-credentials that assess employability and award a certificate as evidence of credential/s.
- Embedding skills for work across the curriculum: Provide innovative models of real-world, project-based learning experiences endorsed by industry to support schools at macro and micro levels. Offer coordinated opportunities at a regional level for teachers to access industry and gather the knowledge and understanding required to embed employability skills within subject content.

The [Gateway to Industry Schools program - Food, wine and tourism](#) provides coordinated teacher professional development that may be considered a model for good practice. Opportunities for industry-based learning are available over a broad range of subject areas including Food and Nutrition, Hospitality Practices, Tourism, and qualifications from the SIT Tourism, Travel and Hospitality Training Package, with the Young Winemakers Program linked to chemistry.

## 3. What are the learning attributes necessary to prepare students for the future of work in a world of digital communication, robotic process automation, machine learning and cognitive technologies?

Many schools would argue that they are not simply preparing students for a future of work. Independent schools believe they are also preparing young people to be positive contributors to society, to be active in their communities, to be leaders and positive role-models in their families; all with the intention of making the world a better place. Independent schools also want their young people to love learning and to take from schooling a life-long quest to continue

to be deep inquirers, investigators, questioners, and seekers of wisdom and understanding. ISQ strongly recommends that this review take a wider view of the outcomes of schooling.

ISQ agrees that the future of work will involve significant digital communication and other features as listed in the question above, but the overwhelming evidence from research is that young people need to be prepared for a future of work that is not accurately predictable. Although there may be some clear trends over time such as increased digitization and automation, the emphasis should be on the unpredictability of what will be in the future. If the future world of work is uncertain, then preparing our young people to be adaptable, resilient, agile learners, who know enough to enable them to be able to problem-solve, think critically and creatively, communicate well across a range of media, be enterprising and collaborative will all be necessary learning attributes to thrive in such a world.

Learning attributes that may help young people develop the range of skills required to manage their career over the lifespan include: -

- Competency-based learning: a continuum whereby students master one competency before progressing to the next
- Personalised / student-centred: a focus on knowledge creation and the skills required to progress to the next competency

### **Selection: how can we help students make better decisions about learning pathways within school?**

#### **4. How can students be supported in the earlier years of school to understand the links between their interests and skills, subject choices and post-school pathways and avoid narrowing their options?**

All schools should have trained practitioners on staff who can develop, implement, evaluate and redesign a P – 12 career program modelled on the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development*. The career practitioner role should be separate to the VET Coordinator yet complimentary, to maximise outcomes for students.

Unfortunately, many schools do not have a dedicated, full-time careers advisor responsible for career education or programs to engage students in learning about their strengths, skills, interests, abilities, future options and pathways. Rather, career experiences are more adhoc and frequently delivered during pastoral care by teachers who may not believe it is their job or have the relevant training, and therefore feel ill-prepared for the task. Often, career conversations are dependent on the interests and passions of individual teachers.

While the Australian Curriculum includes the optional Year 9 and 10 course *Australian Curriculum: Work Studies*, many schools do not offer this subject, perhaps because it is not seen as a priority, there is not enough time, or again, staff do not feel adequately trained to teach the subject content. This said, most independent schools in Queensland do offer students in the

earlier years some opportunities to understand the world of work through specific references in the Australian Curriculum. In Year 9 science for example, teachers are required to teach the following content description from the Australian Curriculum: -

*People use scientific knowledge to evaluate whether they accept claims, explanations or predictions, and advances in science can affect people's lives, including generating new career opportunities (ACSHE160)*

A science teacher may extoll the virtues of having a science career because of new STEM opportunities (e.g. biomechanics, genetic engineering), but that teacher would not be supporting the needs of students in the subject with a passion - for example - in sociology or other fields of work.

Similarly, the economics and business curriculum include this content description that should be taught to Year 8 students: -

*Influences on the ways people work and factors that might affect work in the future (ACHEK031 - Scootle)*

However, a teacher of economics and business may not generally have deep understanding of career education and as such, will possibly limit this teaching point to more familiar examples such as the automation of accounting practices.

The process of supporting students to understand their future pathway becomes more formalized in Queensland in Year 10 with Senior Education and Training (SET) planning.

Below is an extract from the QCAA Student Connect [website](#) about SET plans:

Your SET plan helps you:

- structure your learning around your abilities, interests and ambitions
- think about your education, training and career options after Year 12
- set and achieve your learning goals in Years 11 and 12, and beyond
- include flexible and coordinated pathway options in your course of senior study
- communicate with your parents/carers or teachers/careers counsellors about your post-school plans

Although SET planning is not a mandated activity in Queensland schools, it is heavily promoted and considered best practice for independent schools to undertake. Queensland law requires young people to be earning or learning until they turn 17, or until they achieve a Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) or a vocational qualification at Level III or higher. Young Queenslanders are registered for the QCE during Year 10 or in the 12 months before they turn 16, whichever comes first. SET planning provides the blueprint that assists a young person to map the courses and other activities they will take in order to complete their QCE.

## 5. Is it possible to count other flexible delivery options towards the SSCE and / or ATAR?

ISQ suggests it is important the review consider discussions about ATAR separately from discussions about certification – and in the Queensland case – the QCE. In Queensland, there are many “flexible delivery options” available for students to achieve a QCE including Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority Recognised Studies (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh, ASDAN Awards, Microsoft Office Specialist, Employability Skills Development Course), VET qualifications, QCAA Short Courses and university subjects.

The ATAR is a methodology for placing all students in a rank order to sort those who will qualify for particular courses at universities. There are “flexible delivery options” available for an ATAR. Currently in Queensland, students may study for their ATAR over distance education mode as well as in school. Students may undertake their study over a three-year variable progression model rather than the typical two years. Students may undertake some courses towards their ATAR through university “head start” programs or TAFE instead of school.

**6. What new or different data would help provide a fuller picture of senior secondary pathways? How would that support students to make informed choices and governments to make better public policy decisions?**

We already have significant data in Queensland. For example:

- The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) currently publishes Year 12 Outcomes data each year to illustrate the achievements of that Year 12 cohort – see [here](#)
- ISQ Annual Collection of Work Experience Statistics
- ISQ School-based Apprentice and Trainee Data
- QCAA data on VET enrolments and completions

Students have access to a range of websites and information about careers, university entrance requirements and the pre-requisites required, and jobs that are ‘trending’ - see the following example from the Student Connect (QCAA) portal.

- [Job Outlook](#) is an Australian Government website providing information about Australian careers, labour market trends and employment projections, covering around 350 individual occupations. It includes an interactive [Career Quiz](#) that helps to identify work styles and suggests careers options.
- [myfuture](#) is a comprehensive career and education website that help students explore career options based on their skills and interests.
- [Open Colleges](#) contains career information, links and resources about career pathways and relevant online learning courses.
- [myPROFILER](#) is a career profiling tool developed by TAFE Queensland that uses visual responses to stimulus to suggest career choices that match talents, skills and interests.

The Queensland Department of Education [Next Steps](#) survey provides data on students outcomes post Year 12. The data provides insights about the profiles of students, courses they have entered (and left), mode of study, employment gained, and what forms that employment may take. These surveys have been in place since the beginning of the Education Training Reforms for the Future (ERTF) initiative when the first group of Year 12 students completed schooling in 2005. Some longitudinal work has also occurred. Of the original 40,000 (approximately) students who were in Year 12 in 2005, approximately 5,500 completed an ongoing survey of their outcomes in 2013 – some eight years later.

However, it could be argued that approximately 12% return from the original 40,000 students will not give adequate insights into the plight of the very target groups this review is concerned with. As the 2013 report states “*caution should be used when interpreting comparisons with Indigenous young people due to the small numbers involved*”.

It is imperative methodologies are found that will work with the groups of young people who are the focus of this review. More targeted data is needed to know what is happening to the young people who ‘disappear’ from the systems in place.



## 7. How can schools better connect and inform parents about the value of all pathways?

Clearly parents have an active role to play in supporting the choices of their child and it is in everyone's best interest for those parents to be well connected and informed. However, schools cannot be the bearer of all information and knowledge that parents might need. Independent schools do work closely with their parents about the things that matter to their particular philosophy and ethos. For some schools, this will mean the spiritual and religious development of the young person. For other independent schools it might mean working closely with parents around young people being developed as leaders in community, demonstrating volunteering or enterprise skills.

ISQ suggests parents can be better connected and informed about the value of all pathways through a range of advertisements on popular media and equitable reporting of student outcomes and achievement. The annual, end of year marketing of high achieving ATAR / OP students in printed media featuring headlines such as *"Queensland students wake to a vision of the future with OP scores"* and *"Half of X school students gain OP 1 – 5"* at the expense of other student achievement - such as completion of the first year of an apprenticeship – can send a message about which pathway is prized or most valued.

## Sentiment: how do we change negative perceptions of certain pathways?

### 8. How can we change perceptions toward the full range of available pathways?

Young people are exposed to a range of role models in popular media. Typically, those role models live in beautiful homes or apartments and appear to live impossibly indulgent lifestyles with an endless array of accessories, exclusive holidays and expensive cars. Seldom does a young person see a plumber, commercial artist, gardener or bricklayer portrayed in popular media. When these job types are involved in popular media the person is often shown in a less flattering light, rather than having a positive storyline. Young people's perceptions won't change simply because parents / carers, or the school tell them something different. Shifting young people's perceptions is a far bigger task than any one independent school can take be responsible for.

An approach that could be employed at a national level to begin the change process is (again) to change the language used when describing pathways. Differentiating 'academic' and 'vocational' sends the message that 'academic' learning is more prestigious and leads to university, while VET is an easier and therefore less valued option. The devaluing of vocational pathways unfairly stigmatizes those young people undertaking VET qualifications and may result in some students pursuing an ATAR as opposed to a pathway that better suits their needs and interests.

This perspective is reinforced in *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System* (The Joyce Report) – *"Treating VET as a 'second-rate' option can signal to students that these careers are 'low-skilled' and less prestigious. This runs counter to any push to ensure a skills education pathway is an alternative but equally valid pathway as a university pathway. It also runs counter to the view of industry groups, which focus on the need for highly capable and motivated school-leavers, with strong applied mathematics and*

*technology skills for VET-related careers in trades, cyber security, advanced manufacturing and the mining industry.”*

#Work2030 has a range of short clips schools may use to change perceptions and promote a range of career pathways such as [Why VET is right now](#), [Navigating a future career path](#) and [University or VET? Why the imbalance?](#).

**9. How can we expand our thinking to embrace non-traditional or currently not undertaken pathways?**

It is not ‘we’ but young people who need to expand their thinking and that will only happen if popular media does the same. As indicated above, it is not the role of schools to change the thinking of young people to embrace non-traditional pathways. Young people will embrace non-traditional or currently not undertaken pathways if they see them as desirable. The data on the explosion of enrolments in forensic science that aligned with the introduction of several of shows on television clearly indicates that students will flock to the non-traditional pathways once they see them in popular media.

Given the lack of time and tools career practitioners have to promote non-traditional pathways, a coordinated approach that facilitates the delivery of support programs in schools at a regional and / or state level needs to be adopted. This may require the development and roll-out of programs similar to [The Young Tourism Leaders Program](#) in Queensland, whereby young adults who have traversed alternate and diverse pathways to arrive at a successful and rewarding stage of their career give inspiring and informative presentations to secondary students. Another good practice model worthy of promotion is [The Australian VET Alumni Program](#).

**10. Is a single tertiary education sector with equitable funding that blends both VET and higher education possible or desirable?**

ISQ has concerns about the concept of a single tertiary sector that blends VET and higher education together, unless perceptions are changed. These two sectors are apart for valid reasons. VET is based on students demonstrating competencies to the standard expected in industry. VET has an entirely different philosophical and theoretical basis to universities that are both about teaching and research. In a combined model, ISQ believes that VET runs the risk of becoming the lesser sector.

## Support: how can we support young people to make better decisions about their post-school pathways?

### 11. How can we ensure all pathways are equally understood and promoted to students?

Career Development is a highly specialised field that requires practitioners to have core and specialised competencies to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to deliver quality services to diverse client groups. The Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) – Australia’s peak body for the Australian Career Industry – determined Certificate IV in Career Development as the minimum entry-level qualification for providing an introduction to career development, and the Graduate Certificate in Career Development Practice for Professional Career Development Practice. Both equip staff in schools to provide career advice with the skills needed to access and interpret information and resources about the wide variety of pathways available to young people and promote that information to students through effective communication channels. Thus, the dissemination of comprehensive, accurate and current pathways information can be enhanced through having staff complete endorsed training.

ISQ has offered Certificate IV in Career Development to member schools for over 10 years, and more recently the Graduate Certificate in Career Development Practice. However, with the introduction of the ATAR and a new QCE system in Queensland, staff are limited in the time they have available to attend professional learning activities, reinforcing the issue of insufficient access to time, tools and training.

A good practice model available in Queensland from 2020 to support schools in the promotion of pathways is the Year13 [Truth Project](#), delivered to students in Years 10, 11 and 12. The program clarifies the myths and truths about VET, and students develop a better understanding of transferable skills, vocational pathways, how to use data to make informed career decisions, their strengths and weaknesses and how to create a more realistic career plan. Career advisors and teachers receive support material to assist with conversations before and after project delivery, and an online program is available to parents. The program bridges the gap between young people and the real story behind industries, workplaces, education and their own self-belief. The Truth Project is currently delivered in schools throughout New South Wales and Victoria.

Given research has consistently found secondary students to have a general lack of knowledge about the range of post-school options, feel pushed or encouraged to pursue an unsuitable pathway, have no idea what they want to do when they finish school and want more personalised career advice, the combination of staff training and support programs presents as a way forward to help ensure all pathways are equally understood and promoted.

### 12. Is there a better model of career information and career advice that could be implemented?

An effective model of career education should be nationally consistent to allow for the movement of young people between states, with enough flexibility to accommodate specific school contexts. The *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* framework is a valuable resource to assist in the development of an effective model, with the School Career Development Service: Benchmarking Resource available as a follow-up tool for review purposes

in individual schools. A single source of accurate and current career information is currently being implemented with the formation of the National Careers Institute Service. Combined, these resources along with the support programs mentioned above provide the building blocks necessary for a model of career education that lessens the burden on practitioners in schools.

### **13. What is the most effective way to provide transparent, easy to access, useful information?**

Schools need confidence that the information and resources they are providing are impartial, comprehensive and accurate in helping young people make informed, educated choices about their future. As identified in the *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System*, there is a 'plethora of information' across different websites that is not always complete, difficult to navigate, fragmented and separates VET courses and providers from higher education options. As a result, school students find it difficult to access clear, accurate and up to date information to help them make good choices about post-secondary options. In response, the review recommends a single source of career information on post-school pathways through VET, higher education and other training, labour market data, and training pathways and their employment outcomes be established by the Commonwealth. Included in the information provided to students would be the likely demand for a particular occupation, the average cost and length of training and education, qualification(s) required, and the likely immediate and future income. A key objective of the information source would be to reduce the mismatch between study choices at school and potential career pathways.

A single source of career information would reduce the time school career practitioners currently dedicate to searching through the overabundance of information about the Australian Job Market, growth industries, and other data that helps students connect with career pathways. Further, if the drain on resourcing is reduced, career practitioners will have more time to personalise career support for every student, and particularly those from diverse groups such as students with disability, non-English speaking or refugee backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, students in remote, regional and rural locations and students at risk of disengaging.

### **14. How do schools make better connections with parents and industry to facilitate informed advice?**

Independent schools throughout Queensland make connections with parents in a variety of ways including SET Planning, subject information nights, career events, college website news blogs and Facebook pages, weekly newsletters and face-to-face interviews. SET planning is perhaps the most effective way of facilitating informed advice, provided the session is not restricted by time and review meetings are scheduled.

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, connections with parents requires more effective communication with school learning pathway advisors and may involve supplementary resources such as the use of audio-visual options with community language speakers and / or interpreters who speak the home languages of students and families. To alleviate the geographical isolation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, meetings need to be taken to remote communities and outer regional localities, with interpreters who speak the community language and Standard Australian English provided.

Problematic for many schools is how to make connections with caregivers who are working, young or sole parents.

The connections schools have with industry are varied and often dependent on staffing allocations, or the commitment of an enthusiastic person within the school who recognises the worth of industry networks. Where a school has a dedicated industry liaison officer, connections are strong and opportunities for work experience, structured workplace learning, and school-based traineeships and apprenticeships are more readily available. This idea is illustrated by the following example from an independent trade college in Queensland: -

*Each campus has a team of professional Industry Consultants (ICs) whose job it is to assist and support young people with their work experience and school-based apprenticeships. The ICs are in regular contact with employers, particularly at the commencement and completion of a student's industry placement for feedback. This feedback is valuable regardless of whether the young person was successful in being signed up as an apprentice. If unsuccessful, the ICs will speak to both the student and employer to discern where the issue arose. Often, the student simply wasn't a match for the employer or industry they were placed in. This feedback is also extremely valuable for the college, as our main goal is to match technically talented young people with quality employers in the industry of their choice.*

Those schools with a well-staffed vocational or careers department in the independent sector maintain connections with industry through regular meetings with industry advisory groups, and annual events: -

**Example 1:** Every year the College hosts an Industry Partnership dinner for local businesses who have hosted work experience and SATs throughout the year. The meal is prepared and served by Hospitality students to promote the value of vocational training within the school and broader community. Guest speakers from industry, government, training providers and disability services are invited to further promote and advocate for VET.

**Example 2:** To build links with local employers and industry, and help bridge the transition from school to employment, the College employs two Industry Liaison Officers. The College database of employers who support the school with work experience and SATs is extensive, and every year the VET Department thanks industry with a 'Celebration of Success' dinner at a neighbouring venue. Local dignitaries, employers, students and parents consist the 140 attendees who celebrate the learning journey and head start vocational students have into the world of work.

Student work experience remains one of the most useful techniques for facilitating informed advice and making connections with parents and industry. However, the coordination of work experience programs is an onerous task, particularly in small schools, or those regional and remote. The Local Community Partnerships (LCPs) model previously available in Queensland provided work placement assistance to schools and may be viewed as a model of good practice for overcoming current difficulties some schools face. A work placement program that evolved from a LCP and still available to schools today is [scips](#).

## Support for all students: how can we make sure opportunities are available and support is tailored to the needs of all young people?

### 15. What are the challenges faced by different groups of students in understanding and accessing the full range of pathways?

Cultural background, socio-economic status, and regionality can all influence access to pathways and the quality of transitions. For example, Year 12 leavers from the lowest SES quartile are the group most likely to be unemployed or not in education or training and are the least likely group to go to university. They might also have a general lack of knowledge about work-related needs and the opportunities available.

A Special Assistance School (SAS) from the independent sector added further insight into the challenges faced by disadvantaged and disengaged students including: -

- lack of parent, carer or family support,
- negative family perceptions about the world of work,
- student belief they are not smart enough or there is 'no point' in further education or training,
- the need to be at home to babysit and therefore not in education or training, and
- the expectation that the careers practitioner will get them a job.

Mental illness must be also acknowledged as a significant barrier in this review.

The challenges faced by many young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are complex, with language barriers and low English literacy a significant barrier to accessing pathway information. Further, some young people are in a cycle of engage, disengage and re-engage, moving from one education sector to another with long periods of absence from school, meaning access to information is disjointed.

Language barriers must also be considered in the case of overseas students who hold a student visa to study in secondary schools. The families of these students choose to make a significant investment in an Australian secondary school education. These students generally come with aspirations to continue their studies in tertiary institutions in Australia or to use the senior secondary qualifications they have gained in overseas institutions. This cohort of students in many cases contributes to the cultural diversity of school communities and will potentially build positive links with Australian families, institutions and communities that will endure throughout their lives.

### 16. Are there specific approaches that could be implemented to reduce or remove these barriers?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families require access to information regarding authentic learning pathways that will genuinely lead to employment or further study. They need greater exposure to careers in the early years of schooling and tailored assistance to make more informed decisions on subject selection during senior secondary. Where employment is the goal, data about job opportunities in remote, very remote and outer regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities could be made available in a platform to schools.

Majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools need highly skilled, trained staff to deliver career programs and VET qualifications to Indigenous students. They need training in the linguistic challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families and the ability to work with community elders and cultural advisors, as well as curriculum leaders within the school.

Some of the students who are the focus in this review do not complete Year 12 and could be in boarding situations in schools. They have had to leave their remote communities in far north and western Queensland due to secondary schools being so far away. These students can suffer significantly from homesickness and feeling alienated from their cultural and family roots. Funding needs to allow for cultural or family members of significance to support them in boarding schools. Those students who do progress to tertiary institutions and other further study are often disadvantaged by the exorbitant rents they have to pay, plus the cost of food, internet, transport and study materials. A model of funding to ease the burden for this target group would be beneficial.

It is also important that future approaches to secondary pathways, whatever these might look like at a state, territory and national level are communicated with an international, not just domestic audience in mind. People to people links developed early in young people's lives are important to Australian national interests for many reasons. ISQ recommends the benefits of change to secondary pathways be clearly articulated to all potential users. Further, it is important the regulatory frameworks that enable overseas students to study in Australia in different education sectors are sufficiently flexible and allow the same or similar access to pathways from senior secondary into other work, further education or training options as other students enrolled in Australian schools, including VET in schools.

#### **17. How do we ensure young people at risk of disengagement have access to relevant support services?**

The largest growth area in the Independent sector is Special Assistance Schools, catering to young people who have disengaged from mainstream schooling. Students are generally referred to the schools by mainstream institutions, government or welfare agencies with expertise in areas such as youth justice or child safety, as well as parents or students themselves. Owing to the highly complex needs and traumatic experiences of many students, well-being is an important part of SASs. Schools are staffed by teachers and youth workers who have specialised knowledge and skills in the unique challenges the young people face and have established networks with other agencies who can provide support such as Child Youth Mental Health, Headspace, TAFE Student Support Officers, the Indigenous Youth Health Service, Disability Employment Service providers, Reconnect Youth and Family Program and Centrelink. The wrap around model used in SAS's ensures a holistic approach to the educational, personal, career and vocational needs of every young person in their care.



**The following case study demonstrates the holistic approach used in an independent SAS: -**

*In 2015, a collaboration was formed between government and non-government stakeholders, and an independent school for marginalised young women. The aim of the collaboration was, and still is, to address the socio-economic disadvantage and mental health issues preventing engagement in education, training and employment. Barriers the students face include: -*

- Homelessness
- Mental health issues
- Family violence
- Access to Centrelink
- Access to services and programs for young mums
- Access to vocational planning and training programs
- Youth Justice issues – trouble with the law
- Obtaining birth certificates and other proof of identity
- Obtaining drivers licence

*The collaborative approach was instigated by a social worker and long-standing staff member who recognised the need to bring together a range of services that could help overcome barriers to participation. Stakeholder meetings are held every term, enabling the school to make services available to students on-campus, or externally through a referral process. Services and programs currently made available to students include: -*

- Fortnightly access to Centrelink on-campus
- Parenting programs and Immunisation Clinic
- On-campus Health Clinic with access to a doctor and nurse
- Social Case Work
- Vocational planning
- Support for trouble with the law
- Learner Licence Program
- Cultural Services
- Youth Mental Health services
- Youth shelter placement and housing
- Suicide harm and prevention

*The collaboration has been hugely successful in helping students re-engage in education, improve employability, gain school-based traineeships, access other VET qualifications, transition to post-school work, further education and/or training and achieve the QCE.*

The effectiveness of the holistic approach used in independent SASs strengthens the case for working with other agencies who can provide support, in addition to and not separate from the school. The process of establishing networks is, however, a cost on human resources and challenged by changes to funding that result in the closure or restructuring of community agencies. A database of up to date support services made available to schools at a regional level would lessen the drain on human resources and provide the equitable access required to collaboratively address at-risk behaviours.