

# Let's Invite Everyone

*An issues paper written to encourage discussion and debate about how the ETRF process can draw on the experience of the youth sector to ensure it will provide ways to engage with **all** young people irrespective of their circumstances*

youth affairs network qld

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# Let's Invite Everyone

*A discussion paper by the  
Youth Affairs Network QLD*

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The Youth Affairs Network QLD (YANQ) is the peak community youth affairs organisation in Queensland. Representing approximately 350 members, we promote the interests and well being of young people across the state. YANQ advocates for and with young people, especially disadvantaged young people, to government and the community.

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## Introduction

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Today, a conservatively estimated **10 000 young Queenslanders aged 15-17 years are not in school, work or training**. The Queensland Government's Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF), due for full implementation in 2006, identifies a range of strategies to keep young people engaged in education and/or training until they either complete Grade Twelve, obtain a Certificate III vocational qualification, get a full-time job, or turn 17.

The ETRF recognises that the school system cannot work alone to address the varied and often complex needs of every single person under 17 years of age. The support of the wider community needs to be harnessed in order to nurture diverse individuals within the schooling environment as well as to offer them real and meaningful pathways for the future. This paper argues that the youth sector is a crucial part of the 'wider community' that needs to be involved.

YANQ supports the intentions of the ETRF to promote the right of all young people to meaningful education. Nevertheless, YANQ has produced this paper to explore some of the concerns about how well the implementation of the ETRF might meet the needs of *all* students. In particular, it discusses the key goals of the ETRF – such as increasing school retention rates – and how the range of skills and knowledge in the youth sector can help to ensure *all* young people are invited and to be a part of education, training or employment as part of the ETRF.

The paper will first explore some of the reasons why young people might become marginalised or disengaged from education, training and employment. Then the paper will begin to discuss some of the skills, knowledge, models and approaches within the youth sector that can assist the implementation of the ETRF to ensure that young people who have become disengaged can be invited and support to re-engage with education, training and/or employment in meaningful ways. There are many examples of how the youth sector can work with young people to successfully re-engage them in education<sup>1</sup>.

## What is the ETRF – A Refresher<sup>2</sup>

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The ETRF is the Government's name for reforms to the education system in Queensland. It involves a large-scale set of complicated reforms to different parts of the education and training system in Queensland. The Government's ETRF White Paper notes the fact that *at least* 10,000 young people aged between 15 and 17 are not currently in any kind of education, training or employment and that better ways need to be found to help them re-engage with learning.

The goals of the ETRF are to engage all young people in 'earning or learning' activities. More precisely, until they are 16 or 17 (depending on the level of education attained) all young people will be required to:

- Stay at school to complete grade twelve; OR
- Start an apprenticeship or traineeship; or
- Enrol full-time in vocational education like TAFE; or
- Start in higher education (university); or
- Get a job.

The other main reforms which affect 15-17 year old school students include:

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<sup>1</sup> One example is the WAY2GO Arts Pathways Pilot Project. This project was a joint initiative between Department of Employment and Training, Arts Queensland and YANQ with cooperation from Brisbane Youth Services, Circus Minimus, Salvation Army, Albert Park Flexi-School and South Bank TAFE

<sup>2</sup> YANQ members will already have received a copy of the YANQ discussion paper "What are Schools For" – you can refer to this for more information about what ETRF involves or obtain a copy of the ETRF white paper from Education Queensland (see <http://education.qld.gov.au/etrf/whitepaper/>)

- Ensuring Grade Ten completion and transition to a senior phase of learning. Schools must take more responsibility for the young people in their care, including having to check where early school leavers end up. They must develop plans for each individual student about the studies from Grade Ten onwards. These are called **Senior Education and Training Plans (SETPs)**.
- Each region must develop a plan on how to help young people stay at school. These are called **District Youth Achievement Plans (DYAPs)**. Through DYAPs, the government enlists the participation of the wider community, including schools, parents, TAFE and universities, industry and business, and community services in helping young people to access or remain in education, training and employment.
- Schools will have access to 100 community-based workers across the State, called **Youth Support Coordinators (YSCs)**, who will support young people at risk of disengaging.
- Changing the way schooling is measured (or “**reshaping senior**”). The Grade Twelve Certificate will record schoolwork, but also include a broader range of learning, eg sporting achievement, vocational training and community leadership.

The basic belief underpinning the ETRF is that young people need to have a Senior Certificate or some kind of substantial vocational or university qualification to put them in a position to compete for jobs in the future. However, while this is an important focus, Governments of all levels and communities must also urgently focus on implementing job creation programs that can provide meaningful and sustainable employment for young people.

YANQ acknowledges that ETRF offers many positive steps towards a more flexible, tolerant and inclusive education and training system. We believe that the principles and values that underpin this reform are about providing children and young people with the opportunities and support they need to access and participate in the education and training systems, and through this increase their opportunities in life.

The major concern about the ETRF is that the more marginalised young people – those already disengaged or at serious risk of becoming disengaged from learning – will not be ‘swept up’ in the broad reforms to the current system, but rather will disappear through the floorboards unless serious consideration is given to the resources, strategies and supports that are required to meet their needs.

To ensure that the most marginalised young people are invited and supported to re-engage in learning, the legislative reforms of the ETRF (especially increasing the school leaving age) must be backed up by broad strategic plans and practical, on-the-ground strategies that bring together young people, their communities, community based services and Government in partnerships. Flexible ways of gaining qualifications must be matched by better support options and opportunities for young people that are able to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged, as well as the highest achievers.

Before discussing the ways in which the youth sector can assist to re-engage young people that simply aren't turning up for school when the bell rings, the paper will first take a look at why some young people become disengaged from learning in the first place.

## Why do young people disengage?

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Young people often become disengaged from education and employment as a result of many cumulative negative experiences both at school or at home or in the community.

Experiences at school or in the education system that might lead to a young person becoming disengaged from learning are:

- being suspended or excluded because of disruptive behaviour

- being unable to take part in education in a way that is flexible and suits your life situation
- having an education setting that isn't able to meet their individual learning and support needs
- being bored and lacking motivation to learn
- having learning difficulties and under-achieving
- being isolated from peers and finding it difficult to make friends
- being pigeon-holed as a 'problem' or 'difficult' student

The socio-economic factors **outside of school** that might lead to disengagement include:

- being unable to find a suitable, secure job
- living in poverty
- being homeless or not having stable accommodation
- being in a family that moves frequently
- family dysfunction, abuse, violence
- not having contact with a mother who is in prison
- experiencing racism
- high expectations from cultural peers and family
- recently arriving in Australia
- coming into contact with the Youth Justice system
- being in the care of the State
- substance use
- having low self-esteem

Often, young people become disengaged from learning as a result of a more than one negative experience in their school, home and community lives. When thinking about strategies that might help to re-engage a young person, their individual and unique situation along with their view of their life experiences needs to be considered.

As the discussion above shows, young people become disengaged from education, training and employment for a variety of reasons. When thinking about ways to re-engage young people, it is important to consider it is important to consider the different factors that might have contributed to the young persons situation and their interpretation of these factors.

When working with young people to re-engage them in learning, it is also useful to consider the 'depth' or complexity of their disengagement and what this might mean in terms of:

- potential places for re-engagement and;
- the levels of resources that may need to be invested to ensure that a young person can access their right to education and employment.

## Borrowing from Youth Work Practice

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If we accept that young people become disengaged from learning due to a variety of educational *and* social factors, then it should be concerning that the ETRF process has rested primarily with the Government Departments responsible for education and employment – and less with the Departments responsible for our welfare needs (the Department of Communities for instance). YANQ believes that it is not realistic or feasible to expect the education and training sectors to work in isolation to address the high needs of these young people.

The youth sector has the practice frameworks and strategies that can assist the ETRF process to engage *all* of Queensland's young people by providing a more holistic response to both their educational and social needs. These practice frameworks & strategies have been developed over

many years of experience and research by youth workers and other professionals working in community organisations.

The following section identifies some key practice wisdoms that have been shown through experience and research to work in the successful re-engagement of young people. The first part of this section provides a framework for analysing the depth of a young person's disengagement along with potential places for re-engaging. The next section discusses the key practice wisdoms, followed by a case example that provides an example of the type of practices, programs and services that draw upon these practice wisdoms in working with disengaged young people.

## Levels of Disengagement & Places for Re-Engaging

In addition to talking about the different life situations or factors that contribute to young people becoming disengaged from learning, it is also important to think about the levels or complexity of their disengagement. We can do this by considering other resources & social supports that young people are not accessing, such as family & friends, housing, health and recreational resources. For the purposes of this discussion, the paper uses three levels to represent the 'depth' or complexity of disengagement from learning. As you will see, the higher the level of disengagement for a young person, the less access they have to community and social resources such as those above.

**Level 1-** This level includes young people who are not attending school, other forms of education or participating in meaningful part time or full time employment and those that are at risk of disengaging from these systems. These young people will still have significant contact with family, culture and other social resources.

**Level 2-** This level includes young people who are not attending school, other forms of education or participating in meaningful part time or full time employment and have disengaged from family and/or other immediate support networks but remain connected with some service or support that can assist in re-engaging (eg a youth service).

**Level 3-** This level includes young people who are not attending school, other forms of education or participating in meaningful part time or full time employment and have further disengaged from family and/or other support networks. This level often involves a high level of complex issues such as homelessness, physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse and suicide.

The higher the level of a young person's disengagement, the more complex the re-engagement strategy will likely need to be. The analysis above is not to suggest that some young people who are strongly engaged to their schools and communities do not experience hardships such as those above. Neither does it suggest that to experience particularly traumatic events in life will *necessarily* lead to you being disengaged at a higher or more complex 'level'. Instead the analysis is offered as a guide or tool to think about the different complexities that young people may face.

Using these levels as a guide to analyse the factors that underlie a young person's disengagement from learning offers us some clues (and crucially, hope) regarding the places where re-engagement strategies could be focused. The table on the next page will show how the levels can help to suggest the best places and likely levels of resources needed for reengagement.

## Places for Re-engagement

Level of Disengagement	School	Alt Ed	TAFE RTO	Family Support network	Non-gov't Services	Gov't Service	Commerce	Public Space	Youth Justice	Complexity rating	Resource Intensity
1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Moderate	Moderate
2		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	High	High
3				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Very High	Very High

Levels of Disengagement describes how disengaged a young person is from school, training, family, support networks and the general community.

The major place of re-engagement identifies where the major strategies for connecting with young people at that level of disengagement should focus in order to have a high likelihood of successfully re-engaging them with education and training.

## Key Practice Wisdoms

Re-engagement strategies with young people that have (or are at great risk of) become disengaged from learning are more likely to work when:

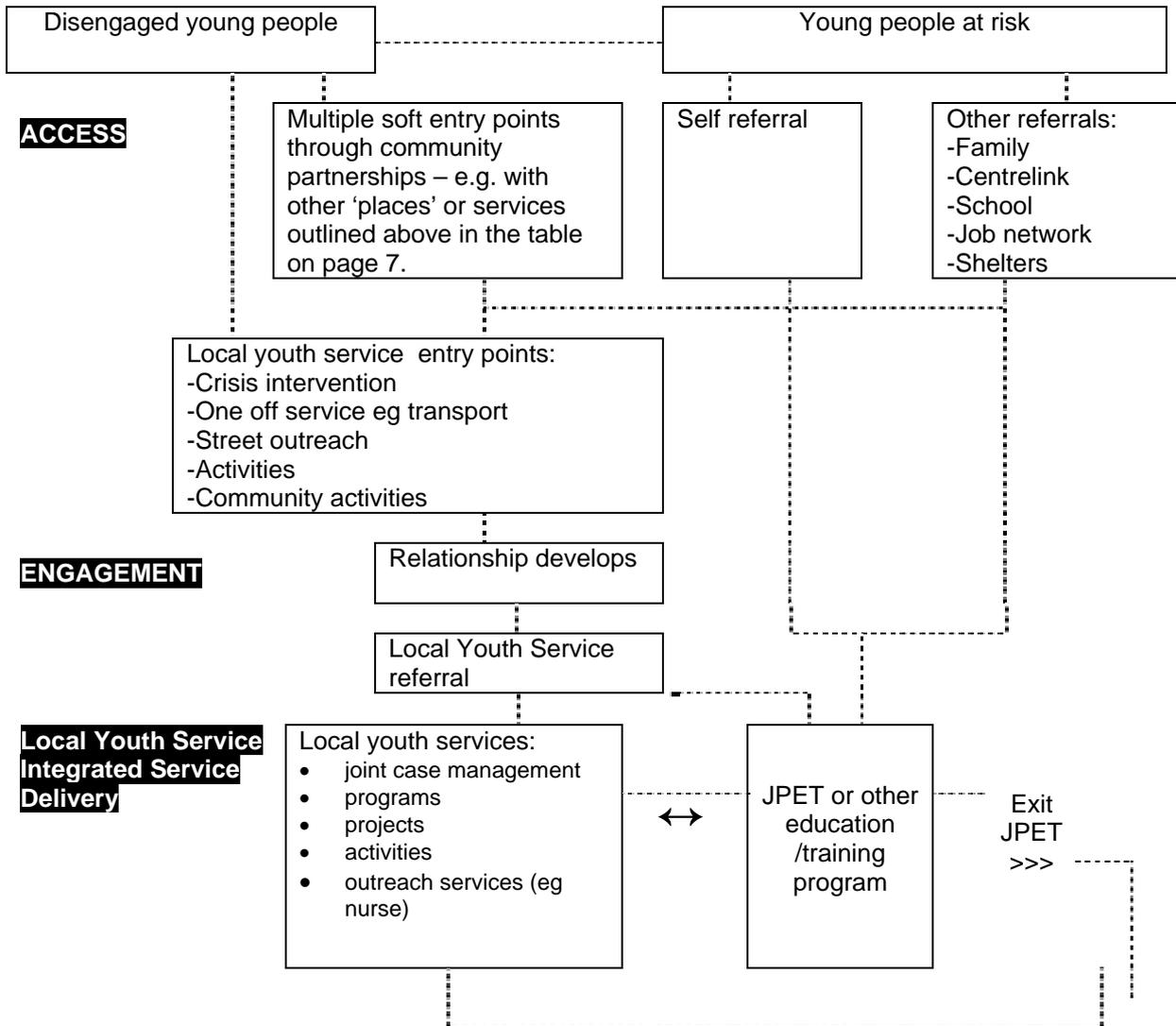
1. Young people's basic survival needs are being met – i.e. adequate income and safe and stable accommodation.
2. Re-engagement strategies are based on strong relationships with young people that emphasise the importance of trust and respect. This occurs when re-engagement strategies create structures that allow young people to:
  - develop initial relationships with workers on their terms and in their space
  - engage with social support and then education services with the assistance of one key worker.
3. Interventions with young people are built also on relationships that have a clear sense of purpose and gentle direction.
4. Group work techniques are used as a thoughtful strategy based on a good understanding of the individual background and uniqueness of each young person, and how group work can assist each individual young person within the group. Group work is less successful as a strategy when young people are grouped only because of similar levels of disengagement or broadly similar reasons for disengagement.
5. There are a range 'safe' ways in which young people can engage with support services - from less structured interventions using outreach strategies to more structured programs and interventions. Having a range of options through which young people can engage services allows them some measure of control over how they engage, and increases the likelihood that they will engage in a way that is meaningful, comfortable and safe for them.
6. Local youth services and other youth agencies (including schools) have developed good working relationships, that allows them to work collaboratively and cohesively with young people.
7. It is accepted that young people's re-engagement with education, training and employment will not always occur smoothly, but that young people will accept and reject opportunities for re-engagement at different points and times due to a range of interconnected factors.
8. Young people are active and voluntary participants in devising and implementing strategies to help them re-engage with education and learning.
9. An action research process is utilised as a method to encourage ongoing reflection and learning about strategies to work with and re-engaging young people in education, training and employment.

## A Model of Re-engagement

The following model attempts to provide the reader with an example of how the key practice wisdoms outlined above work 'in practice' to provide real opportunities for young people who have, or are about to disengage with their school, family & community. The model is of a youth service in the outer metropolitan area of a major city. This example focuses on the service model structure with particular emphasis on the range of 'soft' entry points, that is, how young people can access the range of services with minimal obstacles and barriers.

Note that in regional and rural communities where population and resources are lower than in metropolitan areas, inter-sectorial cooperation is a key and integral component of any successful service delivery system.

### How young people connect with a local youth service



## Translating ETRF Policy into real Outcomes

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As with all policy positions the success or failure of the ETRF initiative will be determined in the detail. The considerations discussed in the pages that follow must be taken into account in order to ensure that the ETRF provides positive and meaningful changes for disengaged and at-risk young people.

ETRF Strategy	Considerations in ensuring ETRF is a strategy for that engages the disengaged
<p><b>Providing more options and flexibility for young people in terms of pathways and achievements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocational education and training achieve qualifications that are highly regarded by industry</li> <li>• More school based apprenticeships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing the complexity of the flexibility and choices available for young people in order to attain a Senior Certificate needs to be matched with reducing the complexity of the system in terms of how they engage with it, keep track of their achievements and manage their own learning that will be banked with the QSA. Clear and simple articulation of pathways between school, vocational training, higher education and work is essential for young people to make the best use of these flexible options if we are not to lose them along the way.</li> <li>• Clearer articulation of learning from work experience and community activities into skills recognition in terms of VET qualifications (eg young people working on their parents farm will be gaining skills that can be recognised and contribute to gaining a relevant VET qualification) will provide another pathway for young people to remain engaged with learning and meet requirements for the senior schooling pathway.</li> <li>• The increased flexibility of the Senior schooling system to provide pathways for young people across the spheres of school, VET and higher education will ultimately only be of value if the pathways created are meaningful and useful for young people to progress into higher education or employment.</li> <li>• A certificate III vocational qualification must be recognised by the relevant industry as valid and useful and meet industry standards to avoid certification for the sake of it rather than for meaningful outcomes.</li> </ul>



<p><b>Providing more support for young people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As part of the ETRF up to 100 additional Youth Support Coordinator (YSC) positions will be funded across the state</li> <li>Pre employment labour market programs for at risk young people</li> <li>Grants program to trial new initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>YSC can assist with the early identification and intervention with young people within the school environment 'at risk' of disengaging. Scope needs to also be extended to young people engaged with out training or educational systems if our desire is to keep young people engaged with learning.</li> <li>YSC can assist in increasing the level of resource information and referral pathways between schools and community services</li> <li>Coordination and support for these positions will be supplied by two funded 'Hub' positions. The organisation responsible for auspicing the hub workers has detailed a policy framework for YSCs that identifies both the educational and social aspects of reasons that young people disengage or become at risk of disengaging from learning. The framework outlines the role of YSCs as one of taking responsibility for ensuring the social aspects are identified and addressed in the implementation of the support strategies. (QYHC 2004)</li> <li>The status of YSC needs to be raised within the school environment to ensure that issues of the at risk students are accounted for within school planning and resource allocation</li> <li>The YSC should also play a lead role in the implementation and resourcing of the District Youth Achievement Plans</li> <li>A cautionary note in managing expectation for the outcomes and possible deliverables of the YSC program, while the expansion of this project is positively viewed, is that 100 YSC can only make a small impact on the numbers of disengaged young people. For example if we take the figure of 10 000 young people per year who are presently totally disengaged for education, training or employment, crude statistical breakdown indicates that it would require an individual caseload of 100 for each YSC per year to begin to engage all of this group. The complexity of these cases would be moderate to very high. A caseload of this size with the complexity and resourcing requirements would be at best unmanageable. As a general guide caseloads that involve complex and resource intense cases would range from 12 to 20 at any one time. This of course does not include all the other tasks required by the YSC such as the engagement of at risk students within the school environment and pathway and referral development.</li> <li>Inter-sectorial cooperation is critical when designing and implementing vocational programs for disengaged young people, flexibility of activities, timetabling and approach is essential. The WAY2GO Arts Pathways Pilot Project a joint initiative between Dept of Employment and Training, Arts Queensland and YANQ and in cooperation with Brisbane Youth Service, Circus Minimus, Salvation Army, Albert Park Flexi-School, South Bank TAFE provides an excellent example of such cooperation</li> <li>Expansion of the concept of alternative education structures and employment programs for young people that have disengaged with the mainstream system as the major alternatives is critical to providing real options for all young people. Changing the terminology of 'alternative education' to the introduction of the notion of a 'continuum of educational or learning setting' is more consistent with the idea of 'life long learning'.</li> <li>One size will not fit all- there is an inherent danger in providing an option for 'at risk' young people eg TAFE employment program and assuming that without scope for significant flexibility backed up by significant resourcing that it will be successful for all or most young people. Multi-factors need to be included in program design, for example the mix of</li> </ul>
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	<p>participants in any targeted group approach needs to be considered as does the skills and experience of staff and the consideration that if the most at risk young people are to be supported to participate and complete the program this will require significant staff time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The use of a broad range of mediums including music, the arts, experiential and adventure based programs within a longer term plan has continuously proved successful</li> <li>• Acknowledgement and valuing of the importance of a relationship based approach to working with young people in early intervention in addressing potential difficulties within a framework that addresses both educational and socio economic needs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Building community commitment and new community partnerships</b></p> <p>District Youth Achievement Plans (DYAP)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DYAP need to be the product of well coordinated collaborative networks at a local level that can devise solutions for individual young people based within the local context and using the available local resources.</li> <li>• The community sector needs to be recognised for its potential contribution and to be effectively involved in all levels of DYAP</li> <li>• These networks of services and stakeholders require the articulation of clear roles and responsibilities that draw on the expertise and specialisations of the members rather than confuse their boundaries and need to be supported through a central resourcing system to ensure their sustainability. Without adequate resourcing, shared goals and vision and left alone to function within a local area such attempts at collaboration often fall flat, reliant on those individual members personalities, skills and drive to keep them on track.</li> <li>• An increased level of information sharing and understanding between key strategic stakeholders in the areas of education, training, employment, welfare, health and recreational services and resources is critical to ensuring that the socio-educational requirements of disengaged young people are met.</li> <li>• Local communities need to be able to tailor a whole of community response to young people that have or are 'at risk' of disengagement.</li> <li>• A cautionary note that relationships between stakeholders much be based on shared purpose and cooperation, coercive relationships where stakeholder feel they simply have to be around the table must be avoided</li> <li>• Mechanisms for the identification of young people who have disengaged with education, training and employment need to be developed on a community level bearing in mind privacy and confidentiality requirements.</li> <li>• The DYAP needs to identify and develop a range of soft entry points for these young people to re-enter back in the education, training and employment sectors through cooperative and strategic protocols and pathways being developed between all groups.</li> </ul>

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## Conclusions & Further Questions

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The Government's ETRF reforms are a positive step towards upholding the right of young people to receive a quality education. The skills, knowledge and experience of the youth sector are a vital resource that must be drawn upon if the ETRF is to live up to its full potential.

The primary aim of this paper is to encourage discussion and debate about the role that the youth sector can play. YANQ believes that through such discussion it will become clear that the youth sector indeed has an important and vital role to play and that this must be supported by the Government and the wider community.

To move this issue forward, the youth sector, government and broader community must seek answers to some key questions, such as:

- How do we ensure that no young people 'fall through the cracks' and remain unsupported and unengaged in education or employment.
- What are we doing now, in schools, communities and homes to engage those young people that are not involved in learning activities, either in school or in the workplace?
- Is what we are doing now working or is it enough?
- If not, what else should we be doing and who can help?

As the ETRF process trials roll out across the state, these are just some of the questions that the education, employment and youth sectors need to asking and answering. YANQ hopes that this discussion paper will encourage the community and the Government to ask these questions and engage with us to find the answers.

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## Resource List

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- The Review of Pathways Articulation, Gardner, 2002
- The Senior Certificate: A New Deal, Pitman, 2002
- Truancy and Exclusion from School, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1996
- Under Age School Leaving, National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, 1997 National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart
- Education and Training Reforms for the Future: A White Paper, Education Queensland 2002
- Implications of the "Green Paper" on ETRF, for the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle (BUC) Program offered by DET, Rod Lees, August 2002