



youth affairs network qld

"Working together to improve the quality of life of young people in Queensland
and thereby improve the quality of life of society."

“Implementation Implications & Inclusiveness”

**Response
From**

Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ)

to the

***Education and Training Reforms for the Future
(Green Paper)***

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1. About the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ)

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc. (YANQ) is the peak community youth affairs organisation in Queensland. Representing over 350 individuals and organisations from Queensland's youth sector, YANQ promotes the interests and well being of young people across the state. YANQ advocates for and with young people, especially marginalised and disadvantaged young people, to government and the community. Further, YANQ encourages and participates in the development of policies, programs, projects and research that are responsive to the needs of young people, and we promote and support cultural diversity through the employment of a NESB (non-English speaking background) Policy and Network Officer and resourcing for the Non-English Speaking Youth Issues Network.

2. Introduction

YANQ welcomes the opportunity to provide a response on the *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* Discussion Paper. It is commendable that a significant length of time has been given to enable consultation processes – both by Government and community – to be undertaken.

A number of sources and involvements merge to inform this response

- Members direct group consultation & ongoing individual member discussions
- Non-English Speaking Youth Issues Network (NYIN) discussion
- YANQ presence and discussion regarding the green paper in a variety of forums
 - SYAC
 - FACS Youth protocol working group
 - FACS interdepartmental Youth issues forum
 - Continuing discussions and dialogue with members and the youth sector as this response has developed

3. General Comments

YANQ is pleased to input into the discussion regarding the *Education and Training Reforms for the Future Green Paper* as a starting point for the development of further strategies in the area of education and training for young people in Queensland at this early stage of policy and program formulation, and looks forward to continuing dialogue as specific strategies and approaches are developed in the near future.

Indeed it is a positive direction that the youth sector has been able to enter into dialogue regarding long term social change, policy and program development in the area education and training well before the development of a number of specific measures. As such, much of the comment noted below focus on **implementation** concerns and suggestions regarding strategies suggested in the green paper; **implications** that the sector believes must also be taken into account as the future is developed; and challenges to ensure **inclusiveness** of the diverse range of Queensland's young people and ensuring that their needs are met and their rights upheld.

YANQ and the wider youth sector look forward to continued involvements in these future education and training reform directions.

3.1 General Consultation Process Feedback

- There was a range of feedback regarding the changing of the compulsory age of schooling. However, the response was predominantly negative.
- There was support for the proposal of the reorganizing of senior schooling and a year 10 stocktake year, provided there was flexibility for young people to consider options throughout their secondary schooling time.
- There was possible general support for the proposal to record achievements in an expanded scope, depending on how this was implemented.
- There was no support (especially from the community sector) for schools to become the local coordinator.
- There was very strong support to provide greater levels of assistance to young people, with most discussion focusing on the way this proposal might work.

3.2 “Learning or Earning”

“Should young people be required to be engaged in full-time school, vocational education and training or work?”

No. There is something fundamentally wrong about an “either/or” option. The reality is that there are not jobs out there that young people can easily slip into. Options cannot be guaranteed, thus the assumption that learn or earn is highly pragmatic is incorrect. The assumption also ignores the fact that for some young early school leavers, leaving, is a result of the inappropriate learning environment.

With around 70% of all new jobs created in recent years either part-time or casual, and a rise in outsourcing or contract work becoming more and more common, it must be acknowledged that *“traditional life choice secure skilled career employment”* may not be an option for many young people. Again with some 26% of the Australian workforce now casualised, there needs to be considered debate about the changing labour market, and ensuring that political rhetoric does not create the false hope that education and training WILL lead into secure career employment.

There is a level in which the individual has a right to choose, and may choose to travel down paths in education, training and employment, which may not conform to a prescribed or mainstream view of what appropriate learning or earning activities are. There are multiple pathways for young people and this must be taken into account to ensure that *“one way, is not the way, but just one path in the road.”*

While understanding the view that the “learn or earn” principle is one which endeavors to create an equality of opportunity for young people, the realities of the lives and futures of young people are more complex. There are a range of basic human services fundamental to young peoples security and development that go well beyond education, training and employment as outcomes. All young people should enjoy access to education, training and employment opportunities, but they also should enjoy access to housing, healthcare, social and political rights and equality. It is vital that meaningful social policy and practice reforms also accompany the reforms process begun in this green paper.

Real jobs must be created. The health care system needs to be overhauled. Governments need to take seriously (and authentically) the issues, concerns and needs of young people in a holistic and honest way. Employment is not the sole aim of education.

There are broader understandings and definitions of education and employment which are clearly missing from this green paper. In particular alternative education options and their engagements with the reforms outlined in the green paper, as well as a broader view of employment and the realities of the labour market. Further discussion and consultation is required on these realities and they need to be addressed in the development of future papers, models, and responses.

4. Specific Feedback on Consultation Questions - Concerns & Issues Raised

Proposal One - 16 or 17 when leaving school?

1 • Should we raise the school leaving age from 15 to 16?

No. The current education system does not meet the needs of approximately 10,000 young people 15-17 (page 9) therefore it would seem ridiculous to raise the leaving age until the system first addresses the causes of early school leaving, followed by a period of trialing and evaluation.

There was significant discussion and belief that raising the school leaving age would not stop young people from leaving school early. At present there are young people who leave school below the minimum age regardless of consequences. It was strongly believed that this would continue to be the case. It was also noted that the 1996 census shows that around 3% of Australians aged 15 – 19 had left school at age 14 or younger.

2 • Should we raise the school leaving age from 15 to 17?

No – see response to question 1

3 • Would anyone be disadvantaged by the new arrangements?

What new arrangements? – there are none! There was strong view that the new arrangements were a given, and that changing the minimum age is not a significant change to arrangements.

It was also strongly felt that families would be severely disadvantaged as educational costs to the family would increase by maintaining their children in school, as well as young people themselves who may not be able to 'fit in' into the system.

Concern was raised regarding welfare support initiatives and linkages to the minimum school leaving age, and whether the change in age may further marginalize some young people. Responses regarding these issues have been researched and considered through Government department consultation processes and should be presented under separate covers.

4 • What should be grounds for exemptions if we changed the school leaving age to 16 or 17?

Wanting to leave school should be respected as a legitimate ground for exemption and honored. While there are a number of recognized factors relating to early school leaving, vis a vis –

- continual experiences of academic failure,
- inflexible school curriculum and teaching strategies,
- alienating school environments,
- family conflict and breakdown,

- homelessness,
- low self esteem,
- poor student/teacher relations,
- student disinterest in education,
- disruptive behavior,
- desire, and often the **need**, to start earning,
- lack of support and referral mechanisms to appropriate services for young people who are experiencing problems in their academic and personal lives,
- inability for young people to express themselves in a 'rule & regulations' environment

- it was strongly felt that many young people are capable of making decisions about their lives and in conjunction with their families, communities and support workers should be allowed to make their own choices about education, training and employment pathways, including the choice to opt out without being disadvantaged.

5 • Do you support our proposal for automatic exemptions for young people who are in full-time employment or training?

Yes as long as there is opportunity for fresh starts and re-entry back into schooling should the young person wish to do this if training and employment pathways do not work out.

However, it needs to be noted that some participants were unclear what the exemption is being granted from, since education, training or employment is still locking a young person into the "learning or earning" philosophy, and the young persons view of education and job may be different to the definition constructed by government and industry.

6 • Could raising the leaving age to 16 or 17 years negatively affect any other training or employment arrangements for young people?

Yes. What if there are no training or employment options for the 10,000 15-17 year olds who are currently unable to access these options. Again it needs to be noted that education, training and employment as defined in the green paper are not the only legitimate options before young people, and models and processes which have flexibility and enable adaptability to meet the needs of diverse young people need to be considered and developed in conjunction with intended reforms in the education and training arena.

7 • If we adjust the school leaving age to 16 or 17, should the new arrangements start in the Year 2007?

This decision should not be made until new changes are decided upon.

8 • What are the things the Government needs to consider in deciding on a starting date?

Proposal two - Re-organizing senior secondary schooling

9 • Should we re-organize the senior years of schooling to include Years 10, 11 and 12 or maintain senior school as Years 11 and 12?

There was positive feedback for the proposal to reorganize the senior years of schooling to include year 10, especially as this could have a heightened focus on career choices, appropriate curriculum responses and achieving positive results. However, there was concern regarding the increasing of stress levels from an earlier age, particularly relating to school stress and the issues of suicide and self harm.

While there are a number of demonstrated linked causes relating to youth suicide and self harm (mental health problems, social disadvantage, cultural factors, substance misuse, and adverse childhood experiences to name but a few), there was concern expressed based on anecdotal knowledge of school stress as a high causal factor for many young people who commit suicide or self harm.

It was felt that the tripartite model to be addressed later in this consultation response would assist young people to deal with and overcome many of the issues that may become causal stress factors.

10 • Do you agree with our proposal to use Year 10 as a “stocktake” of a student’s learning?

Responses cautioned the need to be aware of not putting too much pressure on year 10 students in regards to outlining the future, for reasons highlighted above.

It was felt that school processes should be flexible and should allow for continuing stocktake of young people’s goals, achievements, passions, and abilities in a continuing process especially through senior schooling, rather than only in year 10.

11 • Do some students require this “stocktake” earlier?

Students should be able to “stocktake” whenever necessary as noted above.

12 • What can we do to improve coordination between all relevant sectors - school, vocational education and employers?

Participants noted firstly that the community youth sector was a significant gap in the above mentioned sectors. The community youth sector supports community based alternative education sites, and various youth worker programs and positions that work with various schools eg. YSC, shelters, Reconnect, JPET, etc., and is considered a key sector in the delivery of outcomes proposed in the green paper.

Currently there are a number of concerns relating to barriers between the above mentioned sectors. Later in this response a model will be discussed that may alleviate many of the concerns perceived by the community sector.

Also raised was concern regarding the framework for students at educational risk which is supposedly attempting to improve outcomes for young people at educational risk, but which remains un-resourced and not working.

13 • Who should be responsible for driving this improved coordination?

The goal of improved co-ordination will be addressed below in the context of a possible working model. The role of young people should not be forgotten, as a number of pilot initiatives in the area of education, training and employment outcomes, show the importance of young peoples participation in the processes.

14 • Should the re-organisation be introduced in 2005 or earlier?

Probably after current year 8 students have completed year 12, to ensure future students know what changes will occur.

15 • If we re-organize Years 10, 11 and 12 as senior schooling, what are the implications for middle schooling?

16 • Are there other implications related to middle schooling that we need to consider?

Proposal three - Recording achievement

17 • Do you think recording all of a student's achievements, even if obtained outside of the school setting, would be useful for young people?

Not all achievements are quantifiable or assessable, and there was concern that there may be enhanced pressure to perform in extra-curricular activities to ensure recording. At present extra-curricular achievements are recorded in a variety of means – certificates, statements of attainment, etc, and young people are encouraged to record these achievements in their résumé, CV's, or personal portfolio's. It was not felt necessary for schools to take on this function.

Concern was also noted in that, it is not 'ok' for schools to record information other than school achievement and emergency contacts. Privacy does not exist in Australia. It is outrageous that it had been suggested that schools record and 'track' students thinking and analytical skills and citizenship awareness (page 15). It would appear that students civil liberties may be in danger.

18 • Do you think this would be useful for parents?

No. Parents would need education about the value of extra-curricular achievements against traditional academic achievements.

19 • Do you think this would be useful for employers?

No. Again, young people would already present a number of social and community achievements in the context of their résumé or CV. It seems a duplication for this to also be a matter of school record.

20 • Do you think this would be useful for further education and training providers, and higher education providers?

No. For reasons noted above.

21 • What information would employers want to see recorded?

Demonstrated ability/capacity to do the job. Information would then need to be tailored for individual positions, thus should be adapted into résumé's or CV's and job applications, not as a standard school record.

22 • How do you think non school-based activities should be assessed and described?

They should not.

23 • Would we require a new assessment framework?

If this proposal was to be implemented, yes there would need to be a new framework, however, there was concern that not all valuable learning and experience can be assessed.

24 • Should the recorded achievements be part of the Senior Certificate?

If the proposal is implemented, yes.

25 • Or should they be available at any point during Years 10, 11 and 12?

Again, if the proposal is implemented, yes. However it was noted that this information should be available to the students at any point they may require it for their own use.

Strategy one - School as the local coordinator

26 • Do you think the school should have greater responsibility for students and should be the local coordination point until they turn 16 or 17?

No. There was concern that schools having continued involvement in a young person's life after they have left school could be seen as intimidating and invasive.

Again, the concern was raised regarding privacy and that the responsibility of schools as one of academic achievement – information outside of these measures was considered inappropriate.

27 • Do you support our proposal that schools should actively follow up students until they turn 16 or 17?

No. Again there are concerns regarding the intimidating and invasive nature of schools following-up students who may have made certain informed choices to pursue other pathways.

28 • Does the school or the Government have responsibility to encourage the completion of a Senior Certificate after people turn 16 or 17?

Considering the current focuses on year 12 completion, what further strategies could be in place to encourage young people?

29 • If so, how might this work?

30 • Would students, parents, teachers, schools, employers and further education and training providers have to collaborate more to achieve these proposals and, if so, how?

Again, feedback noted the missing community Youth Sector in above interest groups. However, it was felt that there would need to be increasingly enhanced collaboration between sectors and providers to ensure outcomes under these proposals, were some of them to be adopted, but that significant differences in regard to outcomes and ideologies may hinder the development of authentic collaboration.

Consideration of how this may work will be addressed in the model below.

Strategy two - More support for young people and teachers

31 • Do you support our proposal to provide individualized assistance to young people at risk of leaving early and not going on to work, training or further education?

It is appalling that QLD education has basically ignored community based alternative education sites and models. They have not even suggested them as an option within this reform package.

“Inclusiveness”

One of the strategic concerns raised throughout discussion was around the issue of the green paper's relevance, or focus, on inclusiveness. Particularly in relation to missing education options such as community based Alternative education sites, home schooling, or distance education which provide avenues for young people to continue schooling in other than mainstream environments. A key question posed through the consultation processes was *“how do the reforms / future developments engage and link with the variety*

of educational options?” This has not been addressed in the green paper, and the sector strongly feels this should be addressed in the subsequent white paper.

Similarly, there were strong concerns regarding missing groups of high need young people, and the concern of how the possible reforms will effect these young people. Particularly Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people, indigenous young people, those with a disability, young pregnant and parenting women, young people in regional, rural and remote areas of the state, or those young people who decide to ‘opt out’ of education and training pathways. High need groups need higher levels of support, and this must be taken into account in developing a flexible expression of the reforms impacting on young people. Comment was also made regarding the use of medication for behavioral control in educational settings and that this needs to be challenged. YANQ has recently produced a report : *Queensland Children at Risk: the over diagnosis of ‘ADHD’ and the over use of stimulant medication*, and would refer readers to this for further discussion on this issue.

It was felt by some, that these above mentioned groups are targets of the Framework for Students at Educational Risk and that the assumption in the development of the green paper is that strategies and programs to meet the needs of specific grouping will be met through this framework. It needs to be reiterated again that while the framework intends to improve outcomes for young people at educational risk, it remains un-resourced and thus is not working.

It was also felt that while the tripartite worker model, which will be explained in detail below, could meet many of the needs of these high need groups of young people, (especially by ensuring that in high indigenous or culturally diverse areas – culturally appropriate workers may be engaged), the sector would ask that the relationships and engagement with possible reforms be addressed in the subsequent white paper in regard to the needs of high need groups of young people and how these reforms will meet their needs and circumstances.

32 • Would the role of youth worker help more students stay at school or enter full-time employment or training?

Yes. However, the community youth sector is under- resourced and under funded. Both community based alternative education sites and current Youth Support Co-ordinator’s (YSC’s) are only able to service a very small percentage due to limited funding.

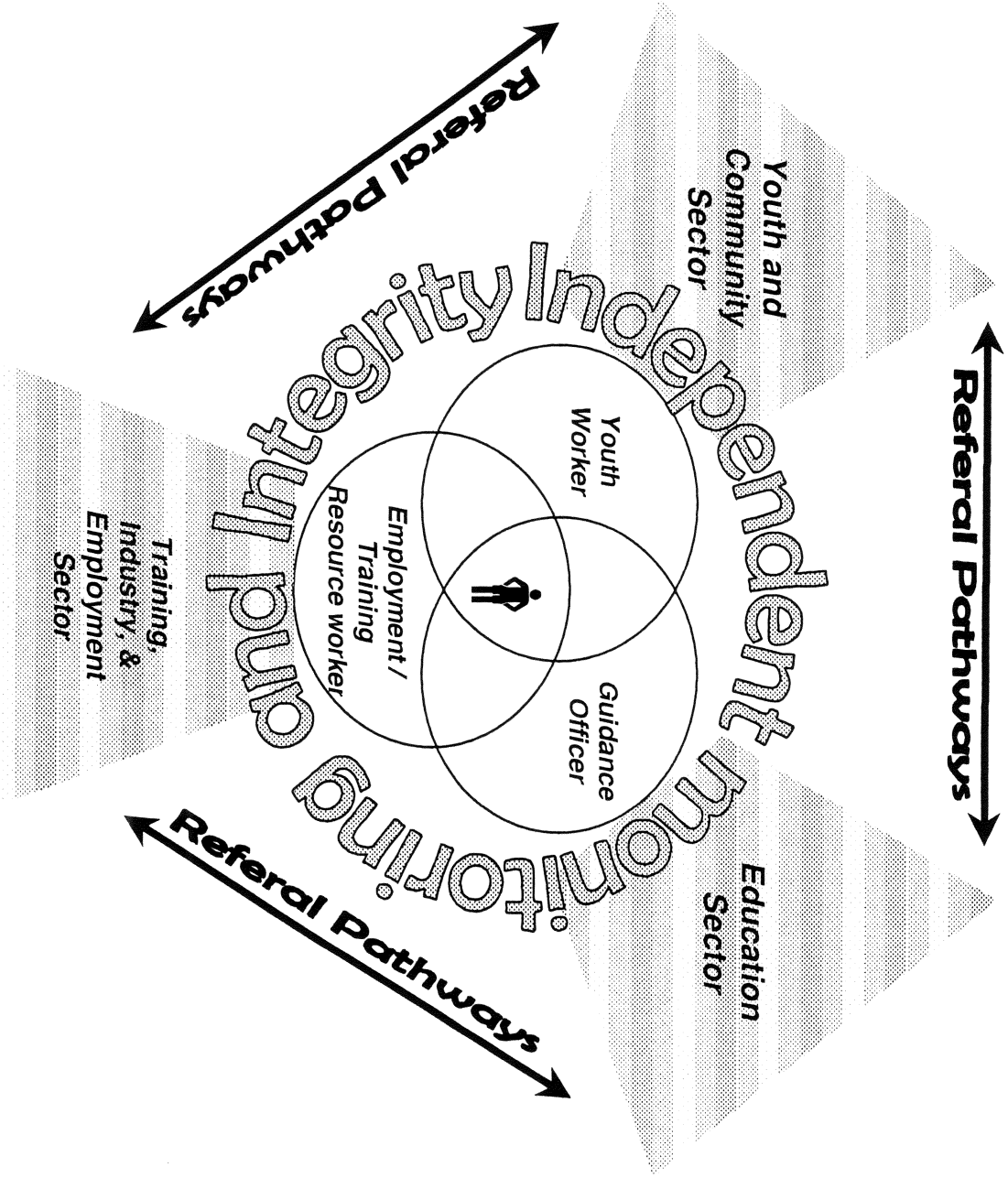
Thus it was pleasing to note in the 2002 State Budget that this area of possible reform has been granted \$40.3 million over 3 years to enable an enhanced response and the subsequent announcement by Minister Judy Spence that 80 new youth support positions would be created from this amount. Although there was concern that this funding will be administered through Education Queensland and not through the Department of Families as is presently the case and which offers the program a number of benefits such as independence from school based management, strategic placement within community networks, and the ability to utilize a range of interventions and strategies, to name but a few.

Nearly all discussion has focused on the issues of implementation, and what an effective model may be to ensure positive outcomes for young people. The following has been developed from these discussions as a response to the Education and Training Reforms for the Future Green Paper.

Participants spoke for a clearly understood model which brought together three key sectors to provide education, training and employment outcomes for young people. It was strongly suggested that the model allow for flexibility and adaptability relating to the needs of young people and social capacity needs, thus creating the environment in which individual and situational responses and interventions could be developed. In essence, participants saw a raft of support for the young person which provided for a range of options.

The model saw three sectors (youth and community sector, education sector, and training, industry and employment sector) converging to the meet needs and facilitate outcomes for young people. The interface between the three sectors and the young person were seen as the school focused youth worker, guidance officer, and employment/ training resource worker respectively.

Figure 1



The model suggests considerable collaboration and brokerage pathways between these three sectors/personnel, as well as an independent monitoring and integrity process to facilitate and ensure effective collaboration, brokerage and outcomes. Indeed, it was felt that community partnership approaches throughout the sector were central to effective outcomes.

Participants suggested a flexibility in outcomes for this model, which need to be defined by the needs and aspirations of young people themselves. If continuing education, apprenticeship or traineeship, a fulltime job or accessing further education is not a outcome desired by a young person, then this would need to be honored and a 'flexible' outcome should be worked towards.

It was also suggested that new learning, training and employment options would possibly need to then be developed to achieve practical outcomes for young people, as well as possible new work opportunities, skills developments and experiences. Support and tracking of the young person also becomes an important element, which was felt would be best served by responsibility residing in the community youth sector due to their linkages and focus on young people as a core priority. For this to be effective, high levels of collaboration and brokerage would need to be developed and maintained, creating an infrastructure that will assist young people to meet their needs, educational aspirations, and labour market realities.

A number of challenges and changes were raised in the context of discussion on this model, focusing on a number of elements which would require further discussion and work, including:

- How to ensure school community ownership, collaboration and management of various initiatives in the context of school based management. Participants strongly suggested that presently, initiatives, policies, strategies and responses fail to reach effective implementation and delivery of effective outcomes in some schools on the grass roots level because of school based management. It was felt that this must be addressed for any future reforms to be effective.
- Schools must refocus their organization and understandings to enable crucial support services to young people to be undertaken.
- Sectors would need to refocus and develop co-operation
- Further directions and linkages which provide health, counseling, mediation and support services to young people while they are still engaged within the educational system are vital and must be resourced.
- All partners must collaborate with local agencies (youth, community, and employment/training) to work towards assisting young people to complete schooling.
- Development of responsibilities and key foci of each of the sectors and principle stakeholders to ensure outcomes (including protocols and reporting mechanisms)
- The need for progressive development of initiatives, action research processes, and ongoing evaluation mechanisms to ensure that outcomes are being met and enhancements made continually.

Key Elements of the model

Youth and Community Sector / Youth Worker

Participants saw the development of youth worker support to be based on an expanded Youth Support Co-ordinator model which has been highly successful in recent years.

Participants agreed that outcomes were successful because -

- It is a model of partnership between schools and community based agencies which can be further developed and built on
- The workers strategic placement within the networks of community services, resources and responses
- The capacity of YSC's to work with families, particularly outside of school and school hours
- Ability to utilize a range of interventions, strategies and practices (individual and family counseling, mediation, group work, information dissemination, peer support programs, in-service training, and referrals)
- Workers were well positioned as expert points of referral
- There has been active support of school leadership
- Collaborative approaches have been used, and
- Program has modeled community agencies working in schools.

Other comments in relation to youth worker support were;

- To be based in the community youth sector. NOT based / employed / integrated in and by the education sector.
- The need to provide strong linkage back into the community youth sector for support
- A focus to enable capacity of community to develop
- The importance of brokerage in areas of – counseling, advice and support, care and concern, referral regarding ‘at risk issues’ decision making regarding options (education, training, employment)
- The enabling of open access for services / agencies in schools
- The tracking young people in transition

Education Sector / Guidance Officer / Student Support

Participants saw the focus of the Education Sector / Guidance Officer / Student Support in the areas of:

- Academic guidance
- Behavior management
- Alternative educational options
- New learning, training and further education options
- Career options and advice drawing on community links

Training, Industry, and Employment Sector / Employment / Training Resource Worker

Participants felt that this sector should be specifically consulted regarding roles within the model, but generally felt that support would be in the areas of:

- Training advice and guidance
- Job networks and pathways
- Training opportunities and options

- Local employment development – linking with youth-friendly labour market opportunities, mapping part-time opportunities
- Work opportunities, placements and skills development

Independent Monitoring and Integrity

Participants were very clear that there needed to be some form of independent monitoring to ensure integrity of the model and its key partners. It was felt that this could be based on an existing or new infrastructure, and while no clear preferences were voiced, suggestions were made.

The only clear direction was that monitoring and integrity should NOT be the responsibility of Education Queensland or the education sector, and thus whatever infrastructure was developed or adapted, it needed to have a authentic independence and be able to honestly engage all partners in collaboration and equality.

The main role of the monitoring and integrity group would be to develop and follow the pathways taken by young people. Particularly in the ability to address and define local initiatives / training / work opportunities for young people, and deal with specific issues that may exist in each of the three sectors in regard to young people.

As well as the school, youth work, and employment training support workers, being involved in this monitoring group/process, other suggested key players may be districts, youth and other interest peak bodies (industry, parents, etc), various services in an area (Centrelink, job networks, JPET, JPP, further education and training, TAFE, youth sector agencies and workers, etc) – without being to large or unwieldy. Should this be seen as a way forward, further development and consultation would need to occur.

Possible infrastructure suggestions were based around –

- School district clusters
- Youth sector interagencies
- Behavior management clusters
- Development of heightened student services units
- New cluster / independent group – regional steering committee
- Separate faculty within a school outside of teaching faculty
- Development of Education Training & Employment Forum/Networks to facilitate further brokerage, elements of best practice in a variety of models

Ensuring brokerage and collaborative partnerships

Participants noted that collaborative partnerships would be enhanced by the development of written protocols as a demonstration of the level of commitment to the process by the three sectors, as well as regular reporting.

Participants also reinforced that there have been various pilots, reports, and evaluations which have shown that the development of community and sector linkages and strategies greatly assist meeting the needs of young people. A number of these are noted in section 6 of this response.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, YANQ is pleased to input into the discussion regarding the *Education and Training Reforms for the Future Green Paper* as a starting point for the development of further strategies in the area of education and training for young people in Queensland at this early stage of policy and program formulation, and looks forward to continuing dialogue as specific strategies and approaches are developed in the near future.

In essence, response to the five areas of consultation from the youth sector have been

- There was a range of feedback regard the changing of the compulsory age of schooling. However, the response was predominantly negative.
- There was support for the proposal of the reorganizing of senior schooling and a year 10 stocktake year, provided there was flexibility for young people to consider options throughout their secondary schooling time.
- There was possible general support for the proposal to record achievements in an expanded scope, depending on how this was implemented.
- There was no support (especially from the community sector) for schools to become the local coordinator.
- There was very strong support to provide greater levels of assistance to young people, with most discussion focusing on the way this proposal might work.

Specifically, comments and concerns have focused on three areas

Implementation of reforms and particularly what model or models will be developed to ensure outcomes;

Implications of these reforms in the context of mechanisms and resourcing to ensure effective outcomes; and

Inclusiveness of all young people's needs in the process of reform. Ensuring that various educational and employment models are acknowledged and built into the pathways young people may take, while secondly that the needs and rights of high need groups of young people are met.

Finally, with considerable wide-ranging focus on these reforms, the question has been posed regarding what the impact will be for young people not in school who do not engage in this process. Will this further marginalize and disadvantage these young people? The sector looks for reassurance that this will not be the case.

6. Some key references / sources which participants have referred to, and noted during discussions

The Boston Consulting Group, 2001, Pathways to Work: Preventing and Reducing Long-term Unemployment

Brooks, Michael, et al, 1997, Under-age School Leaving: A Report Examining Approaches to Assisting Young People at Risk of Leaving School before the Legal School Leaving Age, NYARS

Dearn, Liz, 2001, Negotiating the Maze: An Analysis of Employment Assistance for Young People, Brotherhood of St Laurence

DETYA, 2001, Innovation and Best Practice in Schools: Review of Literature and Practice

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