

## Federation University Submission

### Senior Secondary Pathways Review

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***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?***

Literacy and numeracy skills are fundamental, and employers are increasingly demanding broader 'life skills': the ability to problem solve, to think critically, to work in teams and to navigate complex systems. Students should also acquire a level of cultural competency, and Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander history and perspectives.

Schools, parents and caregivers play a vital role in supporting the development of these skills; and Federation University research demonstrates that there is an opportunity to better educate parents and caregivers about the range of post-school pathways and options (Erica Smith and Annette Foley, 2019)<sup>i</sup>.

There is a role for higher education providers to provide students with additional support to prepare for a degree program. For example, Federation University offers the *Foundation Access Studies (FAST)* program which helps students develop study skills. FAST teaches students how to study effectively, including writing for academic purposes, researching, and using university systems, in order to prepare students to undertake degree level study at Federation University.

In regards to the capacity of schools to meet the needs of students, it is worth noting that in Victoria, in addition to policy interventions at a Federal level, Initial Teacher Education training has been impacted by the imposition of higher minimum ATARs by the State Government. This is leading to a significant decrease in the number of students training to be teachers, with serious implications for the regions, where there is a looming teaching shortage.

This outcome is compounded by existing issues faced by regional schools in attracting and retaining teachers, principals and school leaders - particularly in STEM specialisations - and will have implications for the capacity of schools to meet the skills and career needs of senior secondary students.

### ***How can we help students make better decisions about learning pathways within school?***

There is an important role for universities to play in engaging with senior secondary students. This is particularly relevant in regional areas where participation and attainment levels are lower.

Federation University is committed to engaging with secondary schools across our campus network, and we intend to continue to expand our program of outreach. In October 2019, we signed an agreement with Hallam Senior College that will give Year 10, 11 and 12 students access to mentoring, study support and university facilities at our Berwick Campus. Currently only 16% of the school's Year 12 students go on to study at university. As part of the agreement, Hallam Senior College students will partner with Federation University students to develop study skills and insights into university learning.

In 2020, the program will provide additional support to Year 11 and 12 students with a focus on identifying a pathway to tertiary education, which will include a VCE study extension program, allowing Year 12 students to study a first year university subject as part of their VCE. The partnership will also include professional development for teachers, and research that supports innovation in education practice.

From a national perspective, there is an opportunity to better integrate the large number of existing national and state platforms and websites providing post-school pathways advice to senior secondary students; and to improve their design with the end-user in mind. This is particularly relevant in a RRR context where geographical location can lead to a disadvantage in accessing information.

In talking to young people in rural, regional and peri-urban communities, Federation University researchers Erica Smith and Annette Foley (2019) found that the existing system to support post-school outcomes is not 'joined-up'. While a great deal of information is available to young people, in school or from external sources, they do not find the way in which it is presented particularly useful. External services are piecemeal, and not always trusted. Therefore, there is a significant opportunity to improve the systems and platforms that exist rather than to create new ones, and to achieve better integration and coordination across the system.

Industry and employers also have an important role to play in engaging more closely with schools, to ensure that students are completing their studies with the skills that are needed and applicable to the world of work.

Local employers of secondary school students should be encouraged to engage more frequently with schools, and to communicate possible career pathway options.

As a regional provider, we also submit that implementation of Recommendation four from the National Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) Tertiary Education Strategy Final Report would help to address this issue. The recommendation is to build aspiration, improve career advice and strengthen RRR schools to better prepare their students for success, including by:

- implementing a regionally based model for independent, professional career advice
- improving online career related information and advice
- establishing aspiration-raising initiatives covering both VET and higher education
- expanding access to high quality VET programs in RRR schools
- improving support available to teachers, principals and school

### ***How do we change negative perceptions of certain pathways?***

Research in non-metropolitan areas across Victoria carried out by Federation University researchers (Smith and Foley, 2019) indicates that there needs to be an acknowledgement and normalisation, among schools, parents and students, of all the post-school pathways that are possible.

For example, we deliver the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) through Federation College. VCAL can offer a flexible way of engaging students in vocational and applied learning pathways; however students, parents and employers are unclear about the purpose of VCAL in schools, and this can result in negative perceptions about the program. These perceptions can affect students' decision making about their school and post-school pathways as well as resource decisions made by schools. Ensuring quality in learning and teaching standards, strong alignment with the needs of employers and industry, and improved communication by schools and providers to students and parents could assist in changing perceptions of the pathway.

There is an opportunity for the Federal Government to provide greater incentives to employers to support apprenticeships and traineeships to address specific workforce and skills needs in RRR areas and to widen the choice of occupations available in those areas, and for State

Governments to fund full-time VET qualifications especially, but not only, those which lead to higher education pathways.

Providing students with access to targeted and individualised careers advice in schools can help provide them with the information required to assist in making decisions about post-school pathways that are in line with their interests, skills and capabilities rather than based on generalised community perceptions about certain pathways or careers.

There is a role for tertiary providers to play, in partnership with government and industry, in clearly articulating and better promoting to young people the range of TAFE and higher education pathways that exist and how they lead to specific careers.

### ***How can we support young people to make better decisions about their post-school pathways?***

Federation University research (Erica Smith and Annette Foley, 2019) demonstrates that young people experience a considerable amount of stress when deciding what to do after school – as such there is a need to take the stress out of Year 12, with a stronger emphasis on young people having a Plan B or even Plan C. There also needs to be more ready access to counselling and psychological services in schools, with more personalised guidance for students to mitigate any concerns and prepare them for independent post-school learning and living.

There is a role for tertiary providers, particularly in RRR areas, to engage more closely with schools in Y11 and Y12; to support ‘Year 13’ – the first year out of school; and to develop programs to better support senior secondary school students in transitioning to post-school education. Outreach activities such as university students and staff visiting schools, and open days on university campuses for school students are important.

The *Destination Fed Uni* program allows students to start studying first year degree units in a number of disciplines – including marketing, accounting and health - as part of their VCE. Students’ results are counted towards their ATAR and they earn credit towards a university degree. Students are able to complete up to four units of study at no cost. We have partnered with an extensive number of schools across our campus network to deliver the program, and are looking to expand the program.

Employers, including those who regularly employ secondary students in part time jobs, also have a role to play in engaging with students, and promoting specific career pathways. There is the opportunity to boost

industry's outreach to schools, and to provide incentives for large employers to connect with students in Y10, Y11 and Y12. This is particularly relevant in professions experiencing workforce or skills shortages such as STEM, IT, nursing and teaching.

Research by Smith and Foley (2019) emphasises the vital importance of providing work experience programs for every young person while in school, even for those who were already working in part-time jobs.

Federation is committed to improving participation and attainment across our regional campuses. The challenges are greater in RRR areas where students lack access to a wide range of industries and employers. We strongly support the National RRR Tertiary Education Strategy recommendation to: implement a regionally based model for independent, professional career advice; and improve online career related information and advice.

### ***How can we make sure opportunities are available and support is tailored to the needs of all young people?***

There is a critical need to increase the frequency of careers advice provided in schools and to better tailor the approach for individual students. Research shows that the most useful careers advice to young people is personal time with a trusted adviser at school (Erica Smith and Annette Foley, 2019). They may wish to retain this source of advice after leaving school, particularly at the time at which ATAR results are issued, and during the first-year out when changes in circumstances often occur. There is also an opportunity to encourage people in a range of professions to engage with school students, to share career insights and experiences.

The new National Careers Institute (NCI) seeks to improve the quality of career development and resolve a significant amount of fragmented and difficult to use career information and services available. It will be important that the NCI co-designs future programs and outputs with a range of stakeholders including State and Territory Governments, tertiary providers and schools, to ensure an integrated experience for the end-user.

At Federation University, we work closely with prospective students, including school leavers, to assist them in making decisions around pathways to their chosen career. This involves individual and tailored consultation sessions. We also offer the *Foundation Access Studies (FAST)* program which is designed to support students with study skills.

Current research is being undertaken by the OECD on the effects of individual difference (e.g. gender, socio-economic status) on career aspirations. The OECD is analysing the career-related results from PISA (Programme of International Student Assessment) for 15-year olds. These findings should be taken into account in any new policy development.

***Is there anything else you would like the Review Panel to consider?***

There is an opportunity for the tertiary education system to take better account of students' work experiences, volunteering and community activities, which complement their academic accomplishments. Federation has developed the *Federation Advantage* program using our graduate attributes as a criteria to measure co-curricular pathways and skills development.

Federation Advantage accredits volunteer and personal development opportunities to ensure students receive recognition for engagement with a range of opportunities that enhance their social, community and employment prospects. Students are assessed through a system of micro-credentialing and provided with a clear, defined qualification for the Federation Award.

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<sup>i</sup> REF: Smith, E. and Foley, A. (2019) *Young Futures: Education, Training and Employment Decision Making in Non Metropolitan Areas*. <https://federation.edu.au/schools/school-of-education/research/research-groups/rave-researching-adult-and-vocational-education/current-research>