

10 December 2012

The Hon. Peter Hall MLC
Minister Higher Education and Skills
Level 1, 2 Treasury Place
East Melbourne VIC 3002
GPO Box 4367
Melbourne VIC 3001

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of the City of Melton Community Learning Board seeking your support, as a matter of priority, to

- a) Reconsider the cuts made to the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector; and
- b) Consider the commitment of resources to local initiatives that address skill shortages and improve access for young people into training and employment.

The Community Learning Board, whilst understanding the need for reform, find that the nature, extent and targeting of the Government cuts significantly disadvantage low socio-economic status young people.

We cannot stress enough the importance of vocational education to Melton's young people. This is clearly seen in the destination choices of Melton LGA Year 12 or equivalent completers identified in the DEECD 2011 *On Track Survey*:

- Below average students entered bachelor degrees, 43.6% compared to the State average of 49.5%
- Above average entered Certificate IV or above (TAFE or RTO) 23.3%, compared to the State average of 14.2%
- 14% left for the desirable pathways of apprenticeships, traineeships or full time employment compared to the State average of 15.8%.
- 13.5% had an undesirable pathway into part-time work or unemployment, compared to the State average of 13.2%

Destinations of 2010 early school leavers (2011 *On Track Survey*, DEECD) showed:

- 65.1% left for Certificate I-IV courses, apprenticeships, traineeships or full-time employment
- 33.8% left for part-time work or unemployment compared to the State average of 28.8%

The recently published 2012 *On Track Survey* data for 2011 school leavers still indicates the importance of vocational education for the Melton community.

Many of the Certificate level courses that have been cut are often the first entry point for low SES young people. Front of house hospitality courses is one area that serves as an example. Consequent higher fee charges or the total cutting of courses makes first entry access prohibitive for many of Melton's young people. Victoria University, by removing courses from its Melton Campus has further exacerbated access issues.

The diminished opportunity for local and affordable training means that young people have to travel to training. Melton as an outer urban interface Local Government suffers significant transport disadvantage. Currently, approximately 82% of Melton residents travel out of the City for work (2011 Census). The excessive time it takes to travel to training for young people with low identity capital results in high dropout rates or not choosing training at all. School leavers have reported on successive On Track Surveys that transport and the need to earn as reasons why they have not gone on to higher education or training. Transport has also been highlighted in the work of Transport Connections and work of Melbourne's Interface Councils.

SUCCESSFUL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT: A CROSS SECTORAL PARTNERSHIP

The City of Melton has a Community Learning Plan 2011-2014 to reinforce its commitment to lifelong learning for its community, of which TAFE education provision is an important part. Employment and Vocational outcomes and pathways from informal to formal learning are also prominent in Council's Community Learning Plan.

The City of Melton Community Learning Plan 2011-2014 demonstrates the important role Local Government can play in brokering partnerships between education and training providers; Job Services, community organisations and growth industries in a local area. Linking education and training to local jobs has benefits within local communities and connects TAFE learning to the local community.

The City of Melton has demonstrated its active commitment to this through its Building Melton Together (BMT). The key objectives reached by the Building Melton Together include:

- Developing local strategies to address local labour supply and skill shortage issues,
- Providing a streamlined and tailored recruitment option to employers within the building and construction industry
- Increasing labour market participation for youth, including, but not limited to disadvantaged and disengaged
- Establishing and further developing linkages between relevant organisations to provide appropriate and relevant local training and education to improve skills match between employers and job seekers

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed on the 18th of August 2011, by 19 organisations, including TAFE providers, agreeing to work collaboratively to support and skill Melton City residents accessing local jobs in the Building and Construction Industry.

In less than a year the project signed up 343 employers (not all had job vacancies), 62 candidates were placed in employment and many others referred back to training (BMT Employment Broker Fund Milestone Reports, 2011 & 2012 and Building Melton Together, Project Evaluation Report: *The Next Step*, May 2012).

The BMT experience demonstrated the advantage of an independent broker strategically acting as a conduit between training, jobs services and employers. The broker's skills in careers and employability skills assessments and industry knowledge provided excellent outcomes. This model we believe can be applied in a variety of contexts.


A similar model is being applied to a project for people with disabilities we are implementing in partnership with organisation working with disabilities called Work's 4 Me. We have established this project in response to a need to provide support for young people with disabilities as they transition out school into training and employment.

TAFE provision can be much more than what is traditionally offered, delivering a strong community partnership with other stakeholders, contributing meaningfully to the realisation of economic and social outcomes within a local area. The development of the Western Business Accelerator and Centre for Excellence (WBACE) within the municipality builds on this premise and provides a concrete example of what is possible from a partnership approach from community and TAFE. TAFE provision is an integral part of the WBACE method of operation and links directly to available jobs in Melton's urban development.

The City of Melton Community Learning Board strongly urges the Minister to reconsider cuts to the TAFE sector or at the very least make additional resources available to disadvantaged young people who need extra support and encouragement to take that first step into further education and training. The Community Learning Board seeks the Minister's support and commitment of resources to local projects like those described.

Thank you for considering this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine Laffey', with a stylized, flowing script.

Catherine Laffey

Chair
City of Melton Community Learning Board