

DRAFT PROPOSAL

**The Establishment of an Alternative Educational Setting as a
Transition Year from Secondary School to TAFE/Post-
compulsory Education or Training and Employment for Year
10 Students at Risk.**

**A working paper for a potential partnership between Holmesglen Institute of
TAFE and Ferntree Gully College**

**The proposal is based on the Year 10 Trade- based Pathways Program
commenced in 1997 and funded under the DETYA School to Work Programs
funding.**

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Basic Features of the Proposed Program

- Basically the same format as the program which has been in operation for 3 years but in an alternative industrial/workplace setting
- Emphasis on a transition year approach to allow participants to develop and appreciate the skills and attitudes essential to enter the workforce or post-compulsory training environments, leaving a wide range of possible destinations including returning to conventional secondary schooling open to them after the re-engagement process.
- Maintaining the strong links with the secondary environment in terms of sporting participation, pastoral care and co-educational peer contact; debutante ball, theatre production, instrumental music involvement, school camps and outdoor recreation activities. Close contact with individual families and participants' siblings can also therefore be monitored.

Rationale

This proposal, presented by Ferntree Gully College has arisen from the highly successful Year 10 Trade Pathways Program, catering for 'at risk' students, which has been jointly offered by the aforementioned bodies since 1997. It was federally funded by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs from mid-1997 to December 1999 and is currently operating on funds provided under the School-Focussed Youth Services Program.

The undeniable need for an extension and further development of the program is based upon the excellent outcomes achieved to date, the strong employer, parent and community support and feedback, the experiences of TAFE institutions offering such programs as the Technical Trade Orientation Program and anecdotal evidence gained through attendance at the School to Work Project Officers Conference convened by DETYA and the 'Education for Boys' Conference convened by Kings School in Sydney. The recently reported findings by Professor Richard Teese, on student failure rates in VCE, are also very pertinent to the consideration of this proposal.

The proposal should be read in conjunction with the 'Final Report on the Ferntree Gully College Year 10 Trades Program for Students at Risk' submitted to DETYA in May 2000, the article 'Colleges for Youth at Risk', written by Bruce Mackenzie, Director of Holmesglen Institute of TAFE and the report entitled 'Students at Risk' An Investigative Report – Holmesglen Institute of TAFE 1998.

The proposers view this option as truly viable and believe, due to the likely serious local and national social implications of not dealing with the problem of youth unemployment and disengaged youth generally, it should be jointly funded by the Victorian Department of Education, PETE and DETYA.

Underlying Philosophy and Justification

There is currently a large group of disenfranchised and unmotivated youth for whom the conventional approach to education is not relevant or successful. This Year 9 and 10 aged group has become more obvious since the discontinuation of traditional secondary level technical schooling. The vast majority of employers within many trades bemoan this situation and advocate the reintroduction of the schooling process that they experienced. It is generally recognised that it is impractical to return to this former system of preparing students to enter trades. It was the parents of students who voted with their feet against this conventional technical education approach, resulting in a rapid decrease in enrolments in technical schools. It was viewed as a method of separating off the less academic, more 'hands-on' students and providing them with a less rigid education with the focus on compensation for poor skills rather than development of their current skills to equip them for a suitable vocation. The concept of a remedial class is understandably viewed as socially disadvantageous by parents.

This is why the approach being proposed in this submission is viable and advisable. Due to the inclusion of TAFE instruction in a true TAFE institution, parents view their sons as being advanced rather than compensated.

Another major concern of the parents is the young age of their sons and the worry that they may become disconnected from the support of their peer group if they attend full-time TAFE studies.

From a TAFE point of view, there can be certain drawbacks associated with offering younger students positions in full-time training courses such as the Technical Trade Orientation Program at Holmesglen Institute.

- The first of these would be the question of discipline and control. As the institute cannot possibly have the same contact with parents as is possible for a secondary college where students' siblings may have attended or currently attend, it can be more difficult to encourage parental participation and action when problems arise. Some parents are more likely to disown responsibility for their child's behaviour when it occurs in what they view as an adult environment.
- When a young student is confronted with the possibility of drug or alcohol use, it is probably easier for a secondary college to give them access to advice and counselling. Whilst they are only attending TAFE part-time, they are less likely to be drawn into the associated adult culture.
- While the students are still attached to a local school, they are also more able to access work placement with local businesses. This is very pertinent when seeking a placement or apprenticeship in the building industry as the participants are too young to transport themselves to building sites that can often be remote from public transport. A local employer is more likely to be able to transport them each day.
- Regular participation in organised team sport competitions is very beneficial for students of this age and this can be, more effectively, offered by a secondary college through its involvement in school sport clusters.

- The trend of most employers is not to take on younger apprentices. They prefer them closer to driving licence age and to have had some formal trade training. Consequently a transition period is desirable for these younger students.

The employment and training outcomes to date have been excellent but could be further improved for, both, Holmesglen Institute and Ferntree Gully College if the program had more flexible points of entry and departure so that level of maturity and preparedness could be taken, more seriously, into consideration when students entered the Year 10 Trades Program or transferred to full-time TAFE study in a specific Pre-apprenticeship course or the TTOP.

The findings of Professor Richard Teese in his soon-to-be-published book, *Academic Success and Social Power* are to some extent explained by the experiences of those involved in running the Year 10 Trades Program. He found that in some outer suburban schools failure in VCE was far more prevalent. The general improvement in academic achievement of the other Year 10 students after the Trade Homegroup students were removed from their classes has been a very pleasing positive side effect of the program. This can be explained by the fact that unmotivated, academically less capable students, many of whom had been the strong social peer group leaders in their classes had encouraged the growth of a culture which devalued academic performance and this had permeated the entire year level.

These students were also the instigators of disputes over the implementation of basic rules concerning the wearing of uniform, student use of mobile phones and the arrival times at school and class.

Without these students in the general Year 10 classes, the other students became more reasonable and teachable. They became more focussed and ambitious and the general level of staff satisfaction rose.

All of the proposed and current compensatory literacy and numeracy programs in secondary education environments are focussed on Years 7 and 8 students which is realistically the last chance available to dramatically improve broad skill levels. Educationalists and others agree that by years 9 and 10 there are many peer group and social factors which necessarily interfere with the students ability to allow himself to be involved. Consequently, it becomes more important to provide each of these students with a level of numeracy and literacy which will allow them to cope in the workplace. They must become adequately proficient and confident to embark on a career in a chosen trade. It is important to focus their learning on a more narrow range of industry relevant skills and abilities. This is possible in the program being proposed. This program can also serve as a means to give unmotivated or disheartened Year 8 and Year 9 students an incentive to remain in the system with entry to the program as their goal.

It is in the middle years of secondary schooling that we are provided with our last real opportunity to engage and direct this target group of students, before they leave the education system. It is far harder to re-engage a student who has already left the system than it is to motivate, encourage and direct a reluctant student still in the system. The Job Pathways Program has been very successful in enabling young students who would otherwise be unemployed and at risk in the community, to step across to employment directly from school. They have been less successful in attracting and placing young students who have left school and been unemployed and unfocussed for any period of time. The long-term cost savings to the community and the country generally are highly substantial. The costs will otherwise be carried by the justice system, drug control and rehabilitation agencies and the families and local communities in which these 'failed' students reside.

The students must be treated as young working adults and not adolescents. From this it follows that they will be expected to exhibit the traits of responsible individuals heading in their own positive direction. This is what is required of them in the work place and at TAFE so it is essential that they are treated consistently across all three learning environments to avoid any unnecessary minor confrontations due to the conflicting expectations of all parties.

Target Group

The appropriate target group has been identified and refined. They tend to fit the following profile

- male students aged 15 to 16 years old on commencing the program. Older students can tend to be socially disruptive and devious.
- often are ADD or similar condition
- are unmotivated to achieve academically but are willing 'hands on' learners
- have a history of inappropriate behaviour leading to detention and suspension
- can be very socially capable and relate well to adults outside the conventional educational setting ie in a work environment and in sporting clubs
- often come from single parent families with no strong male role model
- have experimented with 'social' drug use
- have an extended history of failure at school and often been held back a year and separated from their age specific peer group
- have very well-developed learned behaviours to avoid having to undertake tasks at which they can be judged to have failed
- often tend to be very physically active and very willing sport participants
- are experiential learners rather than theoretical learners
- hold very definite views and place great importance on fairness and justice of treatment
- often have low self esteem
- can be very creative ie graffiti art and general practical designing abilities
- gain real satisfaction from the completion of concrete tasks with a real product

Proposed Screening Process

The screening process for suitable students for the proposed campus would consider the following criteria

- male only initially, with a view to balancing gender numbers once the program is established
- age and maturity level more relevant than level successfully reached in education
- must have strong family or agency support for their involvement in the program
- no history of serious physically-aggressive behaviour
- no history of 'heavy' drug use
- a genuine motivation to participate in all aspects of the program

Issues relevant to the establishment of a separate Year 10 trade campus

1. Staffing

Teaching Staff - the discerning choice of staff, at a ratio of approximately 8 students to each staff member, is absolutely vital for the success of the venture. These students respond most positively to middle-aged male teachers or instructors whom they view as strong, positive role models. These staff must be experienced yet flexible in their approach in the classroom. Sufficiently sure of themselves to appreciate that confrontation is counterproductive in all dealings with these students. It is essential that they understand that these students respect the individual, not the 'office' of teacher. As has been done in the program to date, it is also necessary that the teachers have real industry credibility in the eyes of the students. This may be due to their past or current involvement in the general trades area being studied ie all TAFE instructors have come from working in the trade, while the trade teachers also have excellent recent trade credentials and experience. Although it is obviously important to improve the ability of the students to relate to female authority figures, it may be advisable to utilise only male teachers at the campus initially.

Support Service Staff – these staff should be youth workers, teachers' aides and Job Pathways Program workers who have had experience in dealing with the local community and developed strong contacts with employers, community service groups and youth support program providers.

Specialist Staff – there should be a capacity to employ, on a sessional basis, individuals with specialist trade skills such as spray painting, air brushing, sandblasting and welding to complement the basic skills being learned, to further capture the interest of the students and present them with a broader range of employment options for the future.

Clerical and Other Staff – it is also important to employ people who strongly believe in the philosophy that underlies this campus and are capable of dealing positively with all of the students.

2. Location

Ideally this campus would be located away from the conventional secondary college environment as this is identified by these students as the scene of past failures. This is essential to minimize the perpetuation of past behaviours as the students are able to view themselves as making a 'fresh start'.

To develop the feeling of transition between secondary schooling and full-time TAFE study or work, it is important to locate this campus in an industrial area

Location (cont'd)

among small manufacturing and service enterprises. The industrial estates situated close to Knox City Regional Shopping Centre are viewed as suitable due to their close proximity to bus transport servicing the entire Eastern suburbs, Centrelink services, Knox Municipal buildings and Knox Youth Services Department and local sports grounds and facilities. There are also a large number of building industry related enterprises in this area which could be approached to enlist their involvement.

The premises chosen must have large open workshop areas, office space suitable for student instruction, secure parking for a small bus and an outdoor seating area.

3. Funding

The proposed campus must be fully funded to allow for a quality education in an environment where the students feel valued and comfortable.

Funding considerations must include

- leasing of an appropriate building
- furnishing of the premises
- purchase of equipment and related on-costs
- leasing of a small bus (30 seater)
- cost of specialist activities ie outdoor education, pre-driver education, specialist trade skill instruction
- purchase of outside agency hours ie Knox Youth Services
- Professional Development support for staff
- Cost of classroom and workshop materials
- Staff salaries and transport expenses – it will be necessary for staff to commute fairly frequently between the three environments across which the students learn. Salaries will include full-time teaching staff, sessional trade staff, clerical support staff and other ancillary staff
- TAFE enrolment, tuition and material fees

It is viewed as essential that each student be fully funded as they tend to be from families that have no employment income or a low single income. Were the program only partially funded, as is the case with current Vet in Schools Dual Recognition courses, the target group would not be attracted or involved.

Establishment of the trade campus and relevant curriculum and program

It is proposed that the campus operate from the commencement of the 2001 school year. As in the past, the program will draw appropriate students from a broad cross-section of other secondary colleges and other educational settings. There has already been a strong demand expressed by parents to place their sons in this course. It is envisaged that the campus would operate a pilot program with 40 to 60 participating students in 2001.

During the set-up phase, it would be most practical to concentrate the students in a maximum of two trade areas; probably Building and Construction in conjunction with Holmesglen TAFE Institute and Automotive in conjunction with Swinburne University of Technology TAFE Institute. The remaining trade areas of Engineering, Hospitality and Horticulture would remain in a separate program on the current Ferntree Gully College campus in Dorset Road. It should be noted that the Hospitality program attracts female participants also and, therefore, is not viewed as suitable to be initially included in the program at the Trade Campus as it would raise complicating social factors.

The students' weekly program will consist of attending TAFE one day, studying the Certificate One in Building and Construction across a broad range of building trades (many of which are currently having difficulty in attracting potential apprentices) or Certificate Two in Automotive. One day will be spent on Work Placement in the relevant industry and another day would be spent at the Dorset Road campus studying basic trade skills and utilising the existing trade workshop facilities. The remaining two days would be spent at the trade campus doing project work and the associated classroom learning.

Students would be encouraged and assisted to participate in all school sports events including athletics and swimming carnivals and interschool team sporting competitions. They would also be fully involved in social events such as the Debutante Ball and the Year 10 Formal.

All students would be given access to career and welfare counselling at the Dorset Road campus.

The curriculum would include team teaching and be project focussed. This is seen to be the most relevant way to instruct these students as it enables the teaching of industry-relevant Mathematics, English, Science and Social skills. The students would always be learning within an easily justifiable and productive context. As in the TAFE certificate courses, they will be working on designing, constructing and installing real products ie bird feeding/nesting boxes for a local park, cubby houses for local kindergartens, seating and play equipment for community playgrounds.

At a later date, it may be possible to set up a business structure and have the students work on sub-contract labouring work for other local businesses. The students could be paid for their work completed each week. This approach would enable the students to –

- further learn essential work habits and requirements
- undertake tedious work
- understand product quality requirements
- appreciate the value of money as a reward for work
- view themselves as self-disciplined and reliable
- experience the social demands of the work place and practise appropriate social skills

The E Team approach, real problem solving in the work place, will be utilised where practical as a link between their workplace and school learning.

Business enterprise skills will be taught and experienced promoting self-employment as a real future option.

Possible support, both financial and mentoring, will be sought from industry. It may be reasonable to ask an employer to sponsor a particular student in the program.

As is the current situation, the proposed program will be complemented by a varied excursion component. These excursions will fall into three basic categories-

- industry-related visits to appropriate work sites and training institutions
- social knowledge excursions which allow students to experience environments which may be encountered in their future ie a magistrates' court, a funeral parlour, a local hospital, a driver education complex
- outdoor education activities to broaden their recreation options ie go-karting, abseiling, snow skiing, canoeing, bushwalking

It will be further complemented by a lifeskills workshop program run by youth workers from Knox Youth Services. The focus of this program is the many common problems faced by young males. It will include information and strategies concerning self-harming behaviour, drug use, peer group pressure, conflict resolution, workplace and sexual harassment, sexual behaviour and general self esteem.

Although they are obviously not being properly prepared to enter VCE, should they wish to do so, they are being remotivated to learn and become socially-engaged members of the community. The success rate for students who have chosen to attempt Year 11 after completing this course has been very good.

It would also be highly desirable for the students to participate in an outdoor adventure camp early in the year in order to facilitate bonding in what can be a fairly diverse group. This may reduce the likelihood of social confrontations later in the year.

Attachments

- A. Final Report on the Ferntree Gully Year 10 Trades Program for Students at Risk submitted to DETYA
- B. Article entitled 'Colleges for Youth at Risk' written by Bruce MacKenzie, Director of Holmesglen Institute of TAFE
- C. 'Students at Risk' an Investigative Report – Holmesglen Institute of TAFE 1998

[Attachments not reproduced]