

Youth Transition to Modern Industry Needs a Rethink.

Andrew Hardiman

Victorian Skills Authority Fellowship, 2025

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First Published 2025

Disclaimer: The Victorian Skills Authority (VSA) provides financial support to the International Specialised Skills (ISS) Institute under a grant agreement to support ISS Institute Fellows' research activities. Although the VSA has provided financial support for this research, the research produced is not a statement of Victorian Government policy. The Victorian Government provides no endorsement of the research's content, findings or conclusions. By sharing this research, VSA makes no representation about the Victorian Government's intention to implement any conclusions or findings identified in the research.

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Printed by Elgin Printing

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ISBN: 978-1-923027-99-2

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01

Synopsis

The International Specialised Skills Institute Fellowship report investigates the Australian and more particularly the Victorian VET in Schools system including pathways transition services with that of the best parts of the USA apprenticeship and internship models. It explores VET Delivery to Secondary Students (VDSS) and the transition services to employment or further education in Australia with both pathways' programs and internship success in the USA. This investigation was conducted as an applied pragmatic multi-method study and funded by the Victorian Department of Education in partnership with the ISSI. It presents data, better practice examples, and recommendations that our VET and school funding systems can adopt. The aim is to better prepare both students for successful transitions and employers for learned practices to support youth into existing and emerging industry. Importantly we recognise that industry is changing

faster than our VET sector and that additional and future skills are required to support longer term success in emerging workforces. Using the VET training system through apprenticeships along with the investment of the school education system, we have the ability to target inductions for employers hosting students for a range of learning and career start processes. Industry associations here in Australia can take a lead from International systems where they invest in employer development that leads to industry members being supported as they recruit, induct and sustain new entrants to industry in the vocational space. We need to continually invest in the link between school and industry and the cultural alignment that employers can build by learning how to best mentor, induct and coach students in the workplace that supports success for a young person.

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Acknowledgements

The Awarding Bodies

The Fellow sincerely thanks the Victorian Skills Authority (VSA) for providing funding support for the ISS Institute and for this Fellowship.

The ISS Institute plays a pivotal role in creating value and opportunity, encouraging new thinking and early adoption of ideas and practice by investing in individuals. The overarching aim of the ISS Institute is to support the development of a 'Better Skilled Australia'. The Institute does this via the provision of Fellowships that allow Australians to undertake international skills development and applied research that will positively impact Australian industry and the broader community.

The ISS Institute was founded in 1991 by a small group of innovators, including Sir James Gobbo AC, CVO, QC, and former Governor of Victoria, who had a vision of building a community of industry specialists who would lead the up skilling of the Australian workforce.

The Fellowship program builds shared learning, leadership, and innovation across the broad range of industry sectors worked with. Fellows are supported to disseminate learning and ideas, facilitate change and advocate for best practices by sharing their Fellowship learnings with peers, colleagues, government, industry, and community. Since its establishment, ISS Institute has supported

over 580 Fellows to undertake skill and knowledge enhancement across a wide range of sectors which has led to positive change, the adoption of best practice approaches and new ways of working in Australia.

The Fellowship programs are led by our partners and designed to achieve the needs and goals desired by the partners. ISS Institute works closely to develop a Fellowship program that meets key industry priorities, thus ensuring that the investment will have a lasting impact.

For further information on ISS Institute Fellows, refer to www.issinstitute.org.au

Governance and Management

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- **Patrons:** Mr Tony Schiavello AO, Mr James MacKenzie and Mark Kerr
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Sponsor - the Victorian Skills Authority

The Victorian Skills Authority works in partnership with the International Specialised Skills Institute by funding the VET International Practitioner Fellowships. The Fellowship program focuses on developing opportunities within the VET sector to assist in building an Education State in Victoria that produces excellence and reduces the impact of disadvantage. In addition, the program is funded to support the priorities of Skills First, including developing capacity and capability, innovative training practices and increasing teacher quality within the VET sector as well as building industry capability and developing Victoria's current and future workforce.

Fellow's Acknowledgements

As an awarded fellow in 2022/23 I would like to recognise the contribution and support from the International Specialised Skills Institute (ISSI) and the Victorian Education Department, particularly the workforces in the Senior Secondary Reforms division. I would also like to recognise supporting RTO's that have provided a sounding board and Community of Practice throughout this journey.

ISS Institute plays a pivotal role in creating value and opportunity, encouraging new thinking and early adoption of ideas and practice by investing in individuals. The clear aim of the ISS Institute is to support the development of a 'Better Skilled Australia' with my fellowship focussed on improving innovation and ideas from an international perspective for VET. The Fellowship program builds shared learning, leadership, a community of like-minded VET professionals and helps create impact across a range of industry sectors and target groups with the Vocational Education sector. Fellows are supported to disseminate their learning and ideas, facilitate change and influence both best practice and policy making by sharing their Fellowship learnings with peers, colleagues, government, industry, and community.

Governance and contributors include:

- Chief Executive Officer ISSI: Dr Katrina Jokity
- Dr Kynan Robinson – Enrusk Florida USA
- Dept of Education Pathways team – 17 strong team of industry professionals embedding the Senior Secondary reforms here in Victoria
- Dr Jason Culbertson – Atlanta University, USA
- Education Department – Deputy Premier, Ben Carroll MP
- Kelly Lyman Ed. Development & Leadership Program at University of Connecticut
- Cayanna Goode Assistant Commissioner for State of Georgia for Adult Education
- Dr. Paul Freeman District Superintendent of Schools in Guilford County, Connecticut

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Fellowship background

I come to this fellowship through my work over many years combining education, vocational education management, employment services experience and now education reform in the Senior secondary system within Victoria. This work led me to a meeting with Dr Kynan Robinson who was based in America and working with their university and college system to advance the innovation and thinking of supporting students with transition to careers post schooling. A community of educators and industry professionals was formed in Florida USA that were looking to map and innovate ideas and models in the transition of new school and university graduates to sustainable and successful careers. Whilst this included a range of occupations, it presented linkages to the work here in Australia of improving the completion rates of apprentices as we observe the growth of vocations and trades across Australia. The sponsorship of the ISSI in partnership with my employer presented an opportunity to travel overseas to observe the coaching and best practices in Florida USA and contextualise this to ideas that support our Australian apprenticeship system. Several communities and industry research pieces existed within Victoria creating an opportunity to engage and trial new coaching/mentoring and support practices based on the models I observed.

At the essence of this research is an enquiring mind, a spirit of we can do better and the appetite that communities in this space can partner, innovate, and improve the transition from school to work with greater levels of support.

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Executive summary

My Fellowship aim was to identify international best practice in the key features that support youth transitions to employment. Australia has a long term successful and proud system for apprenticeships that support students into vocations following an applied learning pathway including introductory VET in schools' courses. The school system is now providing a greater level of funding and emphasis on supporting students remain in school to year 12 through a new program offering, being the VCE Vocational Major. This new program in Victoria (commencing in 2023) is a result of the Firth report that reviewed previous applied learning journeys (such as VCAL) for students that followed a VET pathway in preparation for future work or apprenticeships. Some challenges with VCAL included the poorer perception and status it held compared to the VCE, the lack of rigour in the curriculum learning and the modernisation of content as per other equivalent AQF level 2 school completion certificates. In Australia we can see longitudinal research such as that from NCVET and the Foundation for Young Australians, New Work Order report, - FYA-New-Work-Standard-2020.pdf that demonstrates the role education plays in breaking the cycle for some disadvantaged cohorts. This research demonstrates the advantages and benefits for youth if they attain education levels to year 12 and AQF level 3 or above. This links to the growth in popularity of VET for students in Victoria, yet we need to consider and address the number of students leaving school early for work or to take on apprenticeships prior to year 12 completion and understand why apprenticeship completion rates are so low. This role of employers

in partnership with educators is a key element that can address this challenge. We are seeing employers post COVID grab talent and apprentices early in their development such as year 10, yet not have the capacity, cultural alignment, and funding to support these young people through to completion of apprenticeships. Lower levels of literacy and numeracy can challenge young vocational work entrants, hence we are exploring more diverse learning to support their retention at school whilst gaining great coaching from host employers. How can we change the structure and alignment of goals between all parties (schools, employers, TAFEs, and students) to support better transitions and successful education attainment that frameworks sustainable industry and career progression? Finally, industry spoke to the Firth review and comprehensively through industry boards messaged that they want to play a larger part in the learning and development of new youth entrants.

Specifically, my research focused on strategies to improve the engagement of youth with the employers, and, participation, and completion rates for VET students, particularly following the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. There has been a rapid shift to blended learning at VET institutions globally which has changed the way students engage in VET. Institutions are required to strengthen staff capability and skills in blended learning specific to youth engagement. The Fellowship research has provided opportunities to gather international examples of successful responses to blended learning, especially to support young learners. My report clarifies a range

of strategies in place and new options particularly focused on employer and industry contribution that can assist our success rates. Effective systems and rewards for employers (such as tax credits) for staff that mentor and develop new employees is one option that can set apart good employers that have a sustainable and consistent approach to onboarding and attracting new entrants. Developing 'champions in industry' that can lead new entrants seems a good model with key larger employers that retain youth. Educating employers is another key strength of the USA system both from a skills perspective and culturally. How can Australian youth transition programs including employers tap into the next young generation of workers. Whilst doing so we require employer leaders to be supported to train and develop youth for the dynamic nature in today's industry. This education and tools that can support employers of apprentices or students in Australia is a key link to improving outcomes for our school VET students. A key consideration in this paper is how schools can lead employers with the system and cultural uplift to onboard, mentor and support youth, particularly in the first 12 months as they transition to full time work.

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Background and methodology

The ISSI fellowship had a key aim to blend my operational experiences in Victoria, Australia combined with the research of best practice in supporting youth VET pathways. This knowledge base was then compared with the institutions of America, specifically in Atlanta University and Florida. Observing induction programs in industry, university curriculum and scenario coaching with students were all mechanisms to research how USA internships may impact positively on the Australian pathways system. With lower than expected completion rates at year 12 schooling and apprenticeship completion (2022 NCVET & Education Department data) I was looking for USA system level change that could impact on our education attainment rates. Interviewing 4 staff at Atlanta University, observing curriculum of transition pathways program across multiple industries, and speaking with 5 employers about onboarding processes for internships were all methodologies that supported this applied research piece. This research considered a range of learner types including some disadvantaged learners but focussed on youth between 16 – 19 years of age. Employers also ranged from service industry and technology to manufacturing and traditional trades. The comparisons and key learning are now presented in the paragraphs below and will be reviewed with policy and taskforce members within the Victorian Education system, specifically the Senior Secondary Reform taskforce. Whilst I can see some cultural differences in the way USA internship employers support youth, we have system

level levers here in the Victorian and Australian work based learning at school programs. These programs developing industry and school linkages including work experience in Victoria are underfunded and inconsistent across our sector which leads to further confusion by our employers on what they can expect in such work experience programs.

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Findings

Vocational training plays a crucial role in shaping the future workforce by providing individuals with skills and knowledge necessary for specific industries. In the global context, Australia and the United States are two countries with distinct vocational training systems. This comparative analysis will delve into the vocational training systems of both nations, with a particular focus on the age group of 15 to 18 years. Understanding the structures, strengths, and challenges of these systems is vital for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of vocational training and better prepare youth for the demands of the workforce.

Australian Vocational system

Australia boasts a well-structured and comprehensive vocational education and training (VET) system that caters to a diverse range of industries. The system is governed by both federal and state/territory authorities, ensuring a balance of national standards and regional flexibility. Key features of the Australian vocational training system include:

VDSS (VET in Schools) This program allows students as young as 15 to engage in vocational training while completing their high school education. It integrates practical skills development with academic studies, providing students with a pathway to further education or immediate entry into the workforce.

Apprenticeships and traineeships Australia's apprenticeship system is highly regarded globally. It allows young individuals to earn while they learn, combining on-the-job training with classroom-based instruction. This hands-on approach fosters a direct connection between skills acquisition and real-world applications.

TAFE Institutes Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes play a pivotal role in vocational education. They offer a wide array of courses, ranging from certificate to advanced diploma levels. TAFE institutes collaborate with industries to ensure that their programs are aligned with the evolving needs of the job market.

Industry engagement Australia emphasises collaboration between educational institutions and industries to bridge the gap between education and employment. Industry advisory boards provide insights into current and future skill requirements, ensuring that vocational programs remain relevant. Inconsistent work experience programs operate across our school system that can be reorganised with funding and clear frameworks to benefit all parties.

Strengths of the Australian system compared to the US and other international models.

Age group 15-18 The VET in Schools (VETiS) program allows Australian students aged 15 to 18 to start vocational training while completing high school. This early exposure helps in better career decision-making and smoother transitions from education to employment.

Structured pathways The Australian system offers clear pathways, such as apprenticeships and traineeships, which provide structured routes into various industries. The emphasis on TAFE institutes and industry engagement ensures that vocational training aligns with industry demands.

Apprenticeships The Australian apprenticeship system is well-established and widely respected. It allows individuals to combine practical work experience with theoretical learning. This model has proven effective in producing skilled workers for industries ranging from construction to healthcare.

Flexibility & specialisation The Australian system offers a high degree of flexibility, allowing individuals to specialize in a wide range of fields. This adaptability is essential for accommodating the diverse interests and talents of young learners.

Government support & funding The Australian government provides significant support and funding for vocational education and training. This commitment reflects the recognition of the importance of vocational skills in building a robust and adaptable workforce. Funding will be required to be specific and include a clear framework to support the alignment of industry input, mentoring and coaching that aligns with what schools are building in terms of a student's knowledge and capacity.

Growth opportunities

Perception and stigma Despite the effectiveness of the apprenticeship system, there may still be a lingering societal perception that vocational training is a second-choice option. Changing this perception is crucial for encouraging more young people to consider vocational pathways.

Standardisation Ensuring consistent standards across different states and territories can be challenging. National efforts are required to standardize curricula and qualifications to maintain the integrity of vocational education.

Technology integration Embracing technological advancements in vocational training can enhance the delivery of content and make learning more engaging. Online platforms and virtual simulations can supplement hands-on training.

Internships are a cornerstone of the American education and professional development landscape, offering students valuable hands-on experience and a bridge between academia and the workforce. The American internship model has several strengths that contribute to its success in preparing individuals for the challenges of a competitive job market. Through this research I explore how the Australian VET system (particularly for youth 16 -19 years of age) can benefit from additional cultural and experiential learning that supports improved success in career transition and ongoing education.

Diversity of opportunity: Good models are characterized by its wide array of opportunities across various industries. From tech giants in Silicon Valley to financial institutions on Wall Street, students have the chance to explore diverse fields and gain insights into different working environments. This diversity allows interns to identify their interests and strengths, aiding them in making informed career decisions.

Structured program: Many American internships are part of structured programs with clear objectives, learning outcomes, and evaluation criteria. These programs often integrate classroom learning with hands-on experience, providing a holistic approach to skill development. Structured internships allow students to gain theoretical knowledge in practical settings and foster a deeper understanding of their chosen field.

Socialisation and networking: Networking is a critical aspect of career development, and American internships excel in providing networking opportunities. Interns often have access to

professionals within the organization, allowing them to build relationships, seek mentorship, and gain insights into the industry. These connections can be invaluable for future job searches and career growth.

Real world responsibilities: Unlike some internships that may involve only menial tasks, American internships often provide interns with real-world responsibilities. This not only adds value to the intern's experience but also helps them develop a sense of accountability and ownership. Engaging in meaningful work contributes to skill development and boosts confidence, preparing interns for the challenges of a professional career.

Company culture: Good placements offer more than just professional experience; they provide a glimpse into the culture of the hosting organization. Understanding company values, work dynamics, and communication styles is crucial for interns as they consider potential employers' post-graduation. Exposure to company culture during internships aids in aligning personal values with those of prospective employers.

Flexibility: The American internship model is known for its flexibility, allowing interns to adapt to the rapidly changing demands of the workplace. This adaptability is crucial in today's dynamic job market, where the ability to learn quickly and pivot as needed is highly valued. Interns often engage in projects that require problem-solving and adaptability, fostering skills that are transferable across various industries.

Personal and professional development: Internships include professional development components such as workshops, seminars, and training sessions. These opportunities go beyond the technical aspects of a job and focus on enhancing soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and leadership. The emphasis on holistic development prepares interns not just for their current roles but for long-term career success.

Targeted and quality feedback: Regular feedback is a hallmark of the American internship experience. Interns receive constructive criticism and guidance from supervisors, allowing them to understand their strengths and areas for improvement. This feedback

loop is essential for personal and professional growth, helping interns refine their skills and work towards becoming more effective contributors to the workplace.

Potential for future employment: American internships often serve as a pathway to future employment. Many companies use internships as a talent pipeline, offering full-time positions to successful interns upon graduation. This integration of internships into the recruitment strategy of organizations provides students with a direct route to enter the workforce and kickstart their careers.

Emphasis on learning objectives: American internships typically define clear learning objectives aligned with the intern's academic and career goals. This intentional focus on learning outcomes ensures that interns gain specific skills and knowledge during their tenure. The alignment of internships with academic pursuits promotes a seamless transition from education to employment. In conclusion, the strengths of the American internship model lie in its diversity, structure, networking opportunities, real-world responsibilities, exposure to company culture, flexibility, professional development initiatives, performance feedback, potential for future employment, and emphasis on learning objectives. These elements collectively contribute to a robust and effective system that prepares individuals for the complexities of the modern workforce. As the global job market continues to evolve, incorporating these strengths into internship models worldwide can enhance the overall quality and impact of internships on the future workforce.

Case example - Jayco Caravans in South West Victoria and South East Melbourne are a good example of an employer that is attending to the needs and support that students and youth often require. Analysing their induction systems along with twenty other employers across Australia with consistent use of school-based apprenticeships (SBATs) identifies similarities with the best of the USA system, with the Australian context. Consistent investment by these employers in personnel that are dedicated to effectively case manage and ensure the induction of new entrants to all parts of a business

occurs while learning through SBATS. This does seem more adhoc across Australian industry with a great variety of practice across employers compared to the internship and industry approach by leading employers in USA.

How can we systematise the induction, and train personnel to support the non-vocational but important synthesising and employability linking skills that are vital in our diverse workplaces? A blueprint of what other skills need nurturing and development for sustained success by youth in vocational industries is outlined in the Foundation for Young Australians New Work Order report. Leaning of the trusted vocational training system we can emphasise the focus on key development skills for changing industry equally with the competency-based learning that is required in VET.

Observations

Having observed the cultural differences and the importance of partnership and coaching in the internship approach in America, I can see that here in Australia we need to consider how this may structurally fit in our system.

America and the examples of coaching through an internship in both Florida and Atlanta University present approaches that we can learn from and blend into our practice. It has become increasingly evident that apprenticeship completion rates in Australia are falling. Furthermore, we are seeing students looking to complete qualifications as soon as practical to either leave for higher paid work and to move their vocation into a more specialised field such as solar in electrical.

A consideration we need in our system, particularly for those younger students completing school-based apprenticeships or VET in schools is how we apply a coaching model to develop the key skills and attributes that support retention in the workforce and aspiration to continually develop. A coaching model like an internship allows space for partnership with a colleague, support and exploration on pathways. It doesn't emphasise the assessment and competency approach of the trainer. In fact, removing judgement through a coaching approach allows for expression,

innovation and capacity building to move through the challenges of any educational study to complete a qualification. Our VET system in Australia is rigorous with key relationships with trainers and assessors, employers and colleagues through workplace instruction. To achieve competency often relies on demonstrating capacity and knowledge in multiple settings. For young people this can seem daunting and can often lead to failure or drop out. We have no formal or informal system where coaching and supporting a person to move through not only study hurdles rather to understand the connecting pieces that help us all achieve at work. A consideration would be to fund schools for the provision of initial workplace coaching and mentoring that can help build the employers skills and understanding of what youth can do. By having a coach from an education background and relationship with the school can support a student meet and lean on the next mentor and coach within industry. The educational coach/mentor will have a clear framework of tasks to support and coach and at the same time build the capacity and hand over the alignment to the employer and industry mentor. This process of supported transition for the students and immersive capacity building for the employer can bridge the gap in this school to work transition and align the key people to support a student where they are at. The examples I observed in Atlanta demonstrated a clear model to good internship coaching with an emphasis by the employer to help a student succeed. The internship coach was often relatable, similar in age, had the ability to influence and connect people to others within the industry or employer. They demonstrated a resourcefulness that the students should rely on for the information they needed to connect. Who can help with this and how did they move into that role or level of expertise are examples of discussion points. Employers are competitive and aim to retain and develop their talent in the American internship approach. Our Australian culture in general is less so in this space with the employer more a host and partner to develop the technical skills at the workplace. There is less emphasis on the buddy/coach or internship model where a worker in the industry or with the employer takes a lead in helping a young person succeed not only from an education standing but as a whole person with skills to improve

their trajectory and pathway once they have gained their qualification. The potential alignment that can occur with a school coach introduction to an employer mentor has significant benefits for all and can be best trialled to measure its success. Both the school and industry partner has an implied role and seeks to benefit from making this work and sustaining young talent in a learning journey as they commence work in the vocations

Our Thinking

Taking on board the learnings, impact and benefits from observing how the American internship model works, I see benefits for our VET system to embrace this approach. Creating a coaching model and aligning a person in the industry that can be a workplace mentor, supporter, influencer are all characteristics of the American internship model. The key junction is how do we incentivise this with employers and industry leaders so that we allocate resources, time and effort into something that is less measurable. Our current VET in schools and apprenticeship approach focus on course delivery, workplace hours and competency. There is little to no recognition of the broader skills that develop a young career person and help them sustain a continuous improvement approach to their career path. In part in Australia, we have now put in place a monitoring system by the Apprenticeship Services Network (ASN) to check apprentices on the job so that we can monitor and mitigate against poor employers, bullying and non-commencement of the training plan. TAFES and RTOs are solely responsible for training quality and assessment while employers focus is on workplace hours and releasing a student to study block release or coursework.

I feel that we have an established network of industry peak bodies and associations that can play a key role in lifting the coaching gap that we observe here in Australia. Using the key elements of the internship model of coaching, a trusted person, non-judgemental framework and a connector to other industry learning we can utilise and elevate the impact of industry peak associations. Whilst seed funding from the government may assist the introduction of the concept this model can be a sustainable approach

with alignment of funding between the TAFE/ RTO funded training and a portion of funds aligned to peak associations for coaching. If the funding that goes to TAFE/RTO for the training component had a 10- 15% allowance that went to peak association, we could see a model of coaches coming from the industry bodies. This funding along with membership fees of employers to peak association can build the network of coaches to support all new apprentices with a particular focus on the first two years. Having more intense support and coaching alongside the usual training and workplace learning can lead to higher completion rates, apprentices with capacity building and attributes that sustain workplace longevity and aspiration. Rather than spending more on the training system we can realign the funds that are allocated to apprentices that do not complete to support the establishment of industry-based mentors, internship coaches that provide this coaching service with a focus on the first two years. Building a relationship with an industry linked coach and meeting them formally at least bimonthly is the start of a system that can both replicate the learning from American internships whilst also developing employees knowledge of how industry associations support their workplace business.

07

Impacts of the fellowship

The fellowship has provided me with a focus on system level change and linking the best parts of vocational systems in USA with that of key leverage points in the Australian system. Utilising my knowledge and connection with the Victorian Education Department further enhances the impacts that can lead to policy and system change in both the VET, Senior Secondary schooling, and apprenticeship sectors.

Personal & professional

Personally, the ability to meet, spend time and explore ideas with other like-minded professionals in both the USA (mainly Florida & Atlanta) along with a community of interested professionals in Australia has been a significant growth area for me. Using an applied research framework where we had a goal to explore new systems and challenge the way we have previously conducted learning and VET courses is another key professional development area for me.

I feel the new connections and ongoing refining of an employer education youth induction model that supports youth as they transition to work is impactful. Leveraging this knowledge across the VET and Apprenticeship divisions of Victorian education department through presentations has commenced a journey of change. Meeting with representatives from Victorian Skills Authority (VSA) and with both South West and Federation Tafe is inspiring investment and a commitment to trial new employer induction approaches. I feel well positioned to use the processes learnt from the employers and universities in USA to support new thinking with our

industry bodies. Meeting with the Australian Industry Group (Ai) is another professional occasion that is supporting change and a collective mindset to act.

Broader VET sector

Through the Victorian Education Department, I now have a sector of TAFEs and Registered Training Organisations (RTO's) that specifically service students (year 10 to 12) that are transitioning to employment. This key group of VET managers, including trainers that support workplace learning for students are a key reference group to support change in our systems. Meeting twice per term I am able to collect feedback, share good practice and new processes as we trial some induction processes that support employers onboarding new entrants. We have small group projects occurring through work experience, structured workplace learning and School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs) to benchmark what system and processes best support both employers and industry of different sizes. Utilising students from various backgrounds and cohorts has also led to change where we have implemented specific supports for students in priority cohorts such as Koorie, non-English Speaking background and those with a learning difficulty. Early signs indicate that the presence of formal induction processes with the employer before any SBAT, work experience or workplace trial lead to a better experience for both employers and student. Students feedback in these projects indicate a better awareness of how to handle workplace situations and greater resilience and less anxiety for longer workplace engagement and learning. These trials

and mapping of employers inductions including a 'buddy' arrangement similar to that of the USA approach are proving valuable for a sustained approach across more industry partners.

Our Next Steps

Following on from this report and sharing the learning to increase the successful preparation and transition of students to work and future study via applied learning and VET, we have developed a model to support future innovation.

Using some exiting structures within the Australian system we have embedded trials to support these coaching and best practice transition supports leading toward higher completion rates of apprenticeships and sustainable careers in the chosen vocations.

A consideration was choosing some partner schools that are embedded in supporting students through VET in schools and work experience on the job. By trialling a system where we had checklist, procedure and key skilled staff with time to visit students on the job at work experience we have been able to refine and build a coaching framework that supports industry take over. Learning how to communicate with youth, what we can expect in terms of their capacity and setting a system of regular coaching and face to face mentoring whilst a student is at work experience has delivered significant upside. The four trial schools and approximately 15 employer hosts all reported significant improvement in relationship collaboration, ability to mentor and support and a regular system that can be implemented. The students surveyed all responded with over 90% satisfaction rates with their placement, learning and sense of wellbeing via the support coaching.

HeadStart is a Victoria education department initiative that is now utilising a coaching framework. This program aligns a support mentor and coach that is based in a school to provide regular contact to the student that is a new employee. This includes site visits, training plan guidance and a liaison between the employer and apprentice to coach and clarify expectations, review new learning and align the cultural aspect of work with required performance of the new apprentice or trainee.

Research and evidence over time (so far for 8 months) indicates that this coaching and support at regular coaching intervals is leading toward higher completion rates of apprenticeships. (up to 78% completion rate compared to 57% completion for non-coached apprentices)

Utilising a community of coaches and the HeadStart data in Victoria we continue to revise and explore coaching frameworks, training and development plans and improve the on-site support for apprentices that lead to a more sustainable and supported vocational journey. A challenge with this approach is developing a sustainable 'buddy' in the workplace as staff turnover in many trades continues to remain high. Substituting this with a reliable and consistent HeadStart staff member and coach in school allows for continuity in support and coaching through the essence of a trusted relationship based at the apprentice and students school. This support is now considered essential to the HeadStart service and continue for 6 months post a school exit to sustain an apprentice's effort and consistency in both work, new industry learning and keeping up with the training requirements.

Future plans VET Sector

In 2024 the work to better network and promote the use of youth induction programs as a key part of the learning cycle includes the following:

- Meeting with Australian Industry Group to seek further trials and commitment across new industries.
- A reference group established and meeting each term to bring partners being the Victorian Skills Authority, Apprenticeships Victoria, Senior Secondary pathways reform group and the VET division of the education department. The reference group will guide a strategic plan of commitment and trials to improve our spread of this work.
- Jobs, Skills, and Pathways workforce in the department of Education Victoria will continue to promote this work and provide linkages to the Local learning Employment Networks of Victoria.

- My continued research and work with RTO's, TAFE's and the education system will support investment across the goal of induction programs for all youth employers going forward. This work will include LinkedIn and other department platforms to share best practice stories and seek employer support.
- Sharing of findings including feedback from trial groups to the bodies mentioned above will advocate for greater change and continued investment by partners.
- Creation of a teacher toolkit and induction process for employers and students will be linked into our HeadStart school-based apprenticeship initiative. This program provides coverage across Victoria including all public secondary schools.

08

Dissemination

The work and learnings from the ISSI sponsored fellowship have had an impact on me personally and will advance the concepts across the school system in Victoria, sectoral development across the apprenticeship network in Victoria and Australia and invite others professionally to enquire, build upon and move forward the concepts identified.

I have presented the concepts at the AVETRA 2023 October VET conference in Melbourne and sought collaboration with NCVET to help advance some research on the benefits of coaching in our apprenticeship system. The Victorian TAFE network have been invited to connect and engage with the paper and findings through their TAFE Victoria network and the Australian Employment Network (AEN) have also been briefed on the concept. These networks often work in collaboration to advance concepts, seek pilot funding and trial ideas and projects.

The Victorian Education Department and senior secondary reforms units have been briefed on the paper and invited to consider how they will embrace funding and learning presented in the HeadStart apprenticeship program for all Victorian students.

I continue to connect with my partners in America to share our story and seek further evidence of the coaching impacts in their internship models.

A team from the education department that works with schools and influence policy have been a sounding board and continue to interrogate the finding of my report to explore ways that coaching

and personal development becomes a key pillar for students undertaking apprenticeships.

Whilst this research has created some momentum to the importance of coaching and internship characteristics in our apprenticeship system, it continues to evolve the space and engage funding authorities to support a greater alignment to the importance of inductions, employer support and coaching as integral components.

Some key considerations as we move forward:

- Continue to seek trial school in Victoria and beyond that can follow the procedures mapped and work of our champion school to work transition staff.
- Seek forms from the industry associations that are seeking to be a partner with the Senior secondary reform and are growth vocational sectors.
- Review and publish the procedures, case studies and school to work mentor model that is currently trialled.
- Advocate for further funding (government and industry association) and pilot schools to embrace the industry coaching model.
- Uplift these themes with the state TAFE associations as partners and future funding partners.
- Publish good news stories where coaching and industry mentoring has created new and successful pathways for school leavers.

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Conclusion

The work and networks developed through this fellowship have already impacted the work of TAFEs, apprenticeship partners, students, and the VET sector through thought leadership. We have managed to build communities and reference groups through the coordination of activities and use of data that was initiated through this fellowship sponsorship and experience. It is clear through the data that our VET and school system needs not wholesale change rather an ability to add to and develop better support and partnerships with employers that play such a pivotal role in the learning journey of a young person. Our trial schools and employers are now engaged and mapping the processes that we are seeking to scale across more of the secondary system in Victoria. Using the evidence and ongoing feedback from universities in parts of America along with the established partnerships and reference groups here in Victoria are quality agents and ingredients for change. Lessening the early school leavers, leakage of apprentices before completion of their qualification and building the capacity of employers to work with youth in more targeted, purposeful ways are key findings and events that come from this fellowship. Encouraging investment by a range of stakeholders including industry bodies and employers themselves, is a key model to sustain improved outcomes for youth that transition to vocational industry jobs. Building a relationship with employers early in a placement and having the networks to support longer term aspiration is a key goal of this study that looks to continue our work on both sides of the equation in 2024. Better preparation and learning prior to industry based work

and improved processes and trained staff to support youth inductions through apprenticeships and work placements across our existing and emerging vocational industry.

I am thankful for this experience and continue my passion to improve the Secondary School transition to work systems for our year 11 and 12 students.

Labour market outcomes by highest level of educational attainment, 2018 (%)



Figure 1. Foundation for Young Australians – New Work Order report 2019 illustrating the benefits of education attainment to year 12 & AQF level III VET. School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships are a key conduit to this goal.



Figure 2. Florida USA. The place where internship approaches are being used widely with their Vocational Training of Apprentices, particularly in finance, IT, hospitality, and health.



Figure 3. Dr Kynan Robinson of EnRusk talking at the Innovative Schools conference in Atlanta USA. Kynan was a key partner in this research based in Florida.



Figure 4. Georgia State University was a place of learning during this ISSI fellowship. This institute is a leader in employer development for supporting industry learn how to support their graduate students via better induction programs.

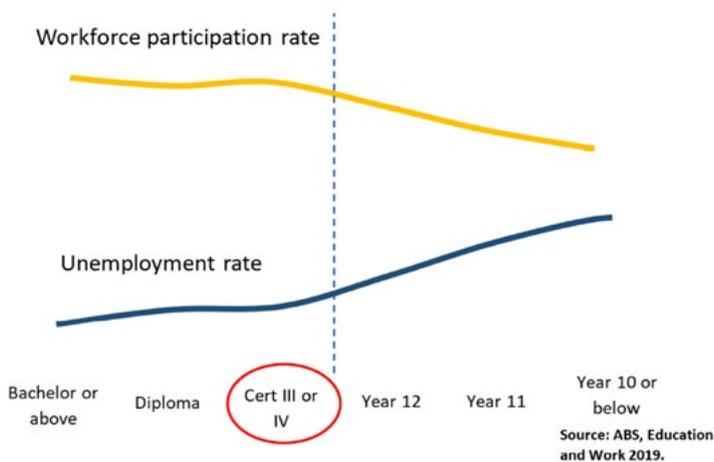


Figure 5. Supporting students workplace learning can lead to better long term careers and workforce participation.



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