



**SUPPORTING SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL TO WORK
TRANSITIONS:
A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY**

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Educating young people and preparing them for work and life beyond school is a responsibility shared by schools, business and the broader community.

Since January 2010, a national network of School Business Community Partnership Brokers (Partnership Brokers) have operated in 107 regions across Australia building partnerships between: schools; training providers; universities; businesses, large and small; parents and families; and a range of community organisations to help young people complete Year 12 or equivalent qualifications and make a successful transition from school to further education, training and employment. The program has supported the development of over 2500 partnerships involving more than 6000 partner organisations and is funded by the Australian Government until December 2014.

The national network of Partnership Brokers is supported by provider representative bodies at the national and jurisdiction levels. This paper, *Supporting Successful School to Work Transitions: A Shared Responsibility*, was developed by the national body (Partnership Brokers National Network) to highlight the imperative for effective cross-sector collaboration, the value of an independent intermediary, and present an opportunity for the Australian Government to build on the achievements of the Partnership Brokers network.

It is only by working together that schools, businesses and the broader community can improve student outcomes, create a more agile and responsive education and training sector, and develop young people who are qualified and work ready. Central to achieving this is engaging business as active partners in education; contributors and influencers in the learning and development of their future workforce.

However, making connections, developing relationships and building partnerships between the education, business and community sectors can be difficult. Different sectors have different ways of operating and different drivers.

Acting as independent intermediaries, Partnership Brokers have been effective in building cross-sector partnerships based on core partnering principles of equity, transparency and mutual benefit. Australia's network of Partnership Brokers is an important piece of infrastructure that provides a catalyst for the development of partnerships and builds the capacity of schools, businesses and community stakeholders to act collectively at a local, state and national level.

Within the context of falling rates of youth participation and growing demand for skilled workers, the Australian Government should extend its support for school, business and community partnerships by funding a network of independent intermediaries with a strong focus on building partnerships that support young people to make a successful transition from school to further study and employment.

Our vision is for the education, business and community sectors to work together to support all young Australians to reach their full social and economic potential.

Carmen Auer

Chair

Partnership Brokers National Network

There are a growing number of young people who are making mixed or poor transitions from school to employment, with implications for individuals, the economy and society more broadly. In May 2013, around 360,000 17 to 24 year olds were not engaged in full-time education and were unemployed or not in the labour force. The number of 17 to 24 year olds in this category has increased substantially in recent years: increasing by 10 per cent or 32,000 persons since May 2012; and 36 per cent or 96,000 persons since May 2008¹. More than a quarter of young people (17–24 year olds) are not fully engaged in work or study after leaving school².

Failure to complete a Year 12 or equivalent qualification has long term negative consequences for a person's future employment and earnings. In the last two decades there has been growth in the demand for jobs that require a bachelor degree or higher qualification, or at least 5 years relevant experience in what are defined as 'high skilled' occupations. At the same time, the demand for low skilled workers with only secondary education or Certificate I qualifications has flat-lined³. This trend is expected to continue.

The state of the labour market is a critical factor in successful school to work transitions, and meeting employment demand is a key to unlocking business success. From the business and industry perspective, skill shortages present a significant challenge and despite responses from governments at all levels, and businesses themselves, skill shortages remain an issue that impacts on individual businesses, industry sectors, the national economy and society more broadly.

A paper produced by NCVET in 2012 makes an important distinction between 'simple' and 'complex' skill shortages⁴. Simpler skill shortages can often indicate business success and are usually short or medium term in duration. Responses from small to medium-sized businesses in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Business Longitudinal Database showed that most firms respond to simple skill shortages by better utilising their existing employees. More complex skill shortages are another matter. They are usually attributed to multiple causes, tend to be more persistent over time and are more likely to result in reduced outputs or production. Around 20 per cent of the employers that reported a skill shortage elected to reduce output (either in absolute terms or in lost growth). This has significant implications for the national economy.

Of course, workforce development is more than meeting immediate or short term recruitment needs. It is a longer term strategy that includes attracting, retaining and developing employees. Partnerships that connect business and industry with young people can be an effective way for business to contribute to the skills and knowledge of their future workforce, attract young people to a particular occupation or industry sector, and also improve young people's understanding of the broad range of education, training and employment options available, including Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS).

While partnerships between schools, business and community at a local level can assist individual businesses to meet their specific workforce development needs, partnerships can also form part of a coordinated, national, industry sector level response to workforce development challenges, resulting in a bigger pool of potential employees for employers to choose from.

The ongoing (but changeable) issue of skill shortages points to a disconnect between the education and training sector and the needs of employers, with consequences for productivity as well as transition outcomes

¹ ABS cat no. 6291.0.55.001 - Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - Electronic Delivery, May 2013

² COAG Reform Council, *Education in Australia 2012: Five years of performance*

³ Nous Group, 2011, *Schooling Challenges and Opportunities – A Report for the Review of Funding for Schooling Panel*, Melbourne Graduate School of Education

⁴ Healy, J, Mavromaras, K & Sloane, PJ 2012, *Skill shortages: prevalence, causes, remedies and consequences for Australian businesses*, NCVET, Adelaide.

for young people. However, strengthening the connections between business and education, creating a more agile and responsive education and training sector, and developing young people who are qualified and work ready, is not the sole responsibility of education and training systems.

The factors impacting on young people's transition from school to work are complex and interconnected. Issues with this degree of difficulty can't be addressed by a single organisation or individual acting in isolation. They demand collective action; changes in the way people and organisations operate and interact. Change at this level requires the sort of cross-sector collaboration that is best achieved through a partnership approach. Cross-sector partnering supports the sharing of resources and expertise and encourages innovative and sustainable solutions that are tailored to local community needs.

However, locally relevant solutions cannot be delivered by a centralised, 'one-size-fits-all' approach, designed and directed from afar. If the principles of localism and collective action are accepted as critical to improving school to work transitions, consideration needs to be given to the practical implications of engaging community stakeholders from different sectors in the design and implementation of programs and initiatives that affect them. This consideration is particularly important in the complex area of collaboration between the education, business and community sectors.

Successful collaboration will be of increasing relevance as schools make the shift from centralised control to greater autonomy and localised governance involving parents, business and community stakeholders. Effective partnerships can deliver sustainable improvements in the way schools operate and interact with their communities and ensure decision making and school operations are responsive to the diverse and changing needs of local communities and their young people.

The importance of interventions that build the capacity of community stakeholders to work together to address factors impacting on education and transition outcomes should not be underestimated. While it will always be necessary to have a level of direct service delivery (i.e. doing things 'for' others) – including services that provide a safety net for young people who have disengaged from education and employment – communities working collaboratively to harness and coordinate resources have the capacity to address factors that lead to disengagement in the first place.

There is agreement at Commonwealth and state government level that cross-sector partnerships are integral to student outcomes and an effective way to engage schools, business, parents and the broader community in the learning and development of young people⁵. However, cross-sector partnerships are easier said than done. Important questions remain:

- How can we overcome obstacles to effective partnering and ensure collaborative effort is directed to areas of greatest priority?
- What investment will maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of partnerships and build the capacity of communities to influence and implement change?
- Whose responsibility is it to lead the way from an isolationist approach to a collaborative one that harnesses the combined efforts of the education, business and community sectors to improve youth participation?

⁵ 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians

THE VALUE OF AN INDEPENDENT INTERMEDIARY

Successful partnerships are based on core partnering principles of equity, transparency and mutual benefit and are recognised as an effective way to manage and sustain cross-sector collaboration. Partnerships are about people working together and success depends on relationships. In the complex territory of cross-sector partnering, an independent intermediary with expertise in partnership development provides both the catalyst for partnership creation, and the support needed to maximise partnerships' efficiency, sustainability and impact.

Making connections, developing relationships and building partnerships between the education, business and community sectors can be difficult. Different sectors have different ways of operating and different drivers. An intermediary that is independent, but understands the different cultures and needs of the various stakeholder groups, can assist partners to develop a shared goal, and a plan of action to achieve it. By maintaining strong relationships with a wide range of stakeholders, an intermediary can identify potential partners, bring them to the table and help them to agree on how they can work together to achieve mutual benefits.

'Despite the clear benefits that can come from schools engaging with their communities, these kinds of collaborations are not easy to build or sustain. Not all school-community partnerships run smoothly. Finding potential partners and resources, knowing who might have the professional expertise to advise and guide program development, gathering information about an area of identified need, knowing how to monitor and evaluate the impact of a collaboration all take time and require different kinds of knowledge and skills⁶.'

'Independent intermediary organisations such as partnership brokers have come to play a critical role developing impactful partnerships. Intermediaries can link organisations together to establish partnerships; help partnerships align their focus with a real need or opportunity; and support organisations to collaborate effectively⁷.'

The report, *Partnerships for Education*, published by the International Business Leaders Forum, recognises the importance of good education to enduring prosperity and economic growth and the key role that partnerships can play in improving educational outcomes. In addition to global initiatives, the report highlights the importance of individual countries taking action to support a systemic approach to developing multi-stakeholder partnerships. The report states that:

'To be effective, partnerships must be well-designed and well-run according to key partnering principles, and partners must have the right skills and be willing to commit to sharing resources, risks and rewards towards a common objective.'

Among the steps to effective partnerships, the report states:

'Ensure that all partners have the knowledge and skills for effective partnering, including a common understanding of the process of partnering so that all partners can be working together from day one along the same partnering journey. Individuals with the necessary mindset and skill set (including interest-based negotiation, mediation, facilitation) should represent partners. Using specialist, independent partnership facilitators or brokers may be hugely helpful by taking partners through the process of building a robust, effective partnership more efficiently, reducing the learning curve and avoiding the common pitfalls.'

⁶ Lonsdale, Michele and Anderson, Michelle, "Preparing 21st century learners : the case for school-community collaborations" (2012)

⁷ SVA Consulting, *Partnering to improve education and transition outcomes for young people*, 2013

The report highlights the Australian Government's School Business Community Partnership Brokers (Partnership Brokers) program as a national initiative aimed at engaging business in partnerships to support the education of potential future employees. The report was developed for discussion at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development which took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 2012.

While changes to school funding arrangements will increase funding to schools over time, this does not automatically equip schools with the skills required to build effective partnerships, nor does it equip businesses and community stakeholders with partnering skills. Many schools, businesses and communities need support to make connections, build networks and develop partnering skills. Governments can support successful collaboration by investing in ways that build the capacity of schools, business and local communities and provide the catalyst for collective action.

'Shifting from isolated impact to collective impact is not merely a matter of encouraging more collaboration or public-private partnerships. It requires a systemic approach to social impact that focuses on the relationships between organisations and the progress toward shared objectives. And it requires the creation of a new set of non-profit management organisations that have the skills and resources to assemble and coordinate the specific elements necessary for collective action to succeed⁸.'

CURRENT SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL, BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Since January 2010, Partnership Brokers around Australia have developed partnerships to help young people complete a Year 12 or equivalent qualification and make a successful transition from school to further education, training and employment.

The Partnership Brokers programme, an evolution of the Howard Government's Local Community Partnerships programme, marks a significant turning point in the history of Australian Government programmes in the school to work transitions space. Its design was informed by an independent evaluation which pointed to the need for more flexible programme arrangements and a more strategic approach focused on capacity building, rather than 'doing things' for schools and their communities. In making this important shift from creating dependency, to empowering local communities, the evaluation highlighted the need for an independent entity to support the development of strategic school, business and community partnerships.

The goal of the Partnership Brokers program is to engage business as partners in education, working alongside schools and their communities to develop the skilled workforce business needs to succeed in a competitive and dynamic global economy. Acting as independent intermediaries, Partnership Brokers strengthen connections between the education, business and community sectors and support them to act collectively to address issues impacting on young people's transition to the world of work.

Capacity building and supporting partnerships to become self-sustaining are key elements of the Partnership Broker role. This enables the Partnership Broker to 'exit' the partnership once it is self-sustaining and move on to support the development of new partnerships. The proportion of partnerships that are self-sustaining has grown from 15 per cent in 2011 to almost 40 per cent in 2013. The Partnership Brokers program has supported the development of over 2,500 partnerships around Australia involving more than 2000 schools, 1800 businesses and 2000 community organisations, with new partnerships being created every week. These partnerships are assisting young people to engage in their education and become productive members of society.

⁸ Kania, John and Kramer, Mark, *Stanford Social Innovation Review, Collective Impact*, 2011

Partnership Brokers are supporting partnerships that deliver improved education outcomes, and also contribute to workforce development goals of employers from a range of sectors (including those experiencing skill shortages). For example, within the context of significant and growing skill shortages in the health and allied health sector, Partnership Brokers are supporting over 200 partnerships involving organisations from the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classifications (ANZSIC) subdivisions of Hospitals, Medical and Other health Care Services and Residential Care services.

A Department of Education survey of over 1000 schools, businesses and community organisations involved in partnerships showed over 90 per cent of partner organisations feel that their partnership is achieving outcomes that support their community and its young people. The results also indicated that a similar percentage highly value the support provided by Partnership Brokers.

A Social Return on Investment (SROI) study conducted by Social Ventures Australia on Partnership Broker regions demonstrated that every dollar invested by the Australian Government in Partnership Brokers has been the catalyst for approximately \$5.50 of created value. This value includes the commitment and investment (both cash and in-kind) of partners from the education, business and community sectors.

The benefits being experienced through partnerships are significant, but they represent only the beginning of what is possible. Partnership Brokers are at the forefront of a cultural change where cross-sector collaboration will become the norm, and partnerships between the education, business and community sectors will underpin Australia’s enduring prosperity.

PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY

School, business and community partnerships are an effective way for business and the broader community to contribute to and influence the skills, knowledge and understandings of the future workforce. This cross-sector collaboration ensures that the supply of prospective employees transitioning from education and training is qualified and ready to meet employment demand.

The Partnership Brokers program currently supports partnerships with a wide range of focus areas on both the supply (education and training) and demand (business and industry) sides of the productivity equation.

THE PRODUCTIVITY EQUATION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING (SUPPLY)	=	BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY (DEMAND)
The education and training (supply) side of the equation encompasses the important role schools and other education and training providers play in educating young people, but also includes the ‘out-of-school’ factors that influence the learning and development of young people.		The business and industry (demand) side of the equation encompasses the need for employers to find the skilled workers they need to be productive in a dynamic and competitive global economy.

Partnerships contribute to the supply side of the equation on a number of fronts, including, but not limited to:

- Improving student engagement and achievement. This includes connecting curriculum to real-life situations through pedagogical practices that engage business and the community.
- Increasing uptake of study in areas of demand (e.g. VETiS, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)).
- Supporting improved education and transition outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds including Indigenous, low SES and those with disability.
- Engaging parents and families in young people's learning and development.
- Improving student health and wellbeing.
- Building teacher capacity and the capacity of schools to engage with their community in meaningful ways.
- Creating new education opportunities and/or more flexible learning pathways for young people.
- Harnessing and coordinating community resources to address factors impacting on education outcomes, including complex factors that lead to young people disengaging from education.

Partnerships also contribute to the demand side in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to:

- Enabling business to engage with young people and promote themselves, or their industry sector, as an employer of choice.
- Raising young people's awareness of the range of education, training and employment pathways available to them. This enables young people to make informed decisions about their future and reduces 'churn' and the associated loss of productivity.
- Supporting pathways to employment in areas of skill and/or labour shortage.
- Supporting the development of technical, occupation-specific skills.
- Building employability skills and preparing young people for the world of work.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Educating and preparing young Australians for the transition from school to further study and employment is a responsibility shared by education, business, families, communities and government. We all have a stake in their success. The Australian Government's investment in the Partnership Brokers program since 2010 has laid a strong foundation for a collaborative, whole-of-community approach to supporting youth attainment and transitions – but there is more to do.

The Australian Government has taken a leadership role in improving the education and training (supply) side of the productivity equation by working with state and territory governments to increase funding to schools over time. However, in addition to questions around the capacity of many schools to engage in effective partnerships, without an independent intermediary to ensure the needs of business and the broader community are considered, there is a risk that partnership activity will be captured by the education and training agenda and neglect the business and industry (demand) side of the equation.

'Independent intermediary organisations ensure that partnership development is not unduly influenced by the interests or bias of one organisation or sector. Rather, they can support a cross-sector focus of a partnership and ensure each partner organisation understands and is committed to the common goals of the partnership'⁹.

⁹ SVA Consulting, *Partnering to improve education and transition outcomes for young people*, 2013

It is only by working together that schools, businesses and the broader community can improve student outcomes, create a more agile and responsive education and training sector, and develop young people who are qualified and work ready. Central to achieving this is engaging business as active partners in education; contributors and influencers in the learning and development of their future workforce. This includes partnerships that support the development of occupation-specific skills, as well as generic employability skills that prepare young people for the world of work.

As major beneficiaries, and with their own strengths and unique perspective to contribute, business and industry must be part of the solution and play an active role in developing their future workforce, and in tackling the complex skill shortage issues that are holding business back.

The final report of the Business-School Connections Roundtable recognises the unique value that business and industry can bring as ‘partners’ in the learning and development of young people¹⁰. The report, which was supported by industry peaks such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group, the Australian National Retailers Association, the Business Council of Australia, and the Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia, expressed the Roundtable’s vision for:

‘...business to work alongside education authorities, schools and students to support the learning and development of young people and enable all young Australians to reach their potential.’

The national network of Partnership Brokers represents an established infrastructure, well connected to their communities, with stakeholder relationships stretching back over a decade and a deep understanding of their region’s needs. The network provides the Australian Government with a flexible delivery arm that can act nationally, or provide intensive support through a place-based approach in response to emerging national or local priorities. The network also provides a point of contact for state and national level stakeholders to engage with local communities and provides a mechanism to support strategic, large scale partnerships, and spread successful partnership models.

For example, Partnership Brokers have supported the development of a national level partnership between the National Australia Bank (NAB), The Smith Family (TSF) and the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) to drive a Work Inspiration ‘campaign’ in Australia. Work Inspiration is a business-led initiative which was developed by Business in the Community in the UK to turn work experience into an inspirational experience for young people and employers.

In addition to supporting the national level partnership between NAB, TSF and FYA to introduce Work Inspirations to Australia, the Partnership Brokers network is supporting local partnership initiatives in communities across Australia to provide Work Inspiration opportunities to young people.

In order to maximise the Partnership Brokers program’s contribution to Youth Attainment and Transitions National Partnership (2010 – 2013) and its goals for improved Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment, the program’s scope was necessarily broad. However, beyond the National Partnership, and within the context of changes to school funding arrangements, it makes sense to shift the focus of future investment to place a greater emphasis on building partnerships that improve transitions from school to work and contribute to the Australian Government’s productivity agenda.

¹⁰ The Business-School Connections Roundtable, 2011, *Realising Potential: Businesses Helping Schools to Develop Australia’s Future*.

Within this context, a network of independent intermediaries is well positioned to contribute to the achievement of a range of related policy objectives, including:

- Improving school to work transitions and ensuring all young people have the opportunity to realise their full social and economic potential.
- Supporting young people to make informed decisions about education, training and employment pathways, including VETiS.
- Supporting pathways to employment in areas of skill and/or labour shortage.
- Supporting the development of technical, occupation-specific skills, as well as generic employability skills to prepare young people for the world of work.
- Increasing the uptake of study in VETiS, STEM and Asian languages.
- Improving education and transition outcomes for young Indigenous people and/or other groups experiencing disadvantage.
- Engaging parents in young people's learning and development.
- Greater school autonomy and independent public schools by engaging school leaders, parents, business and industry and other local community stakeholders in the operation of schools.

The Partnership Brokers network is unique globally. Within the context of a shift by governments around the world toward more collaborative approaches to achieve change, this puts Australia ahead of the curve. Nowhere else has government funded a national network of locally-based organisations to bring stakeholders from different sectors together so that resources, expertise and experience can be shared and outcomes multiplied through collective action. Given the broad ranging benefits to individuals, society and the nation, supporting collaboration by funding a network of independent intermediaries is a core role for the Australian Government.

CONCLUSION

There is a well-documented global trend by governments to improve policy development and service provision by moving away from a centralised, command and control approach, to one based on collaboration and disciplined innovation¹¹. This has given rise to a number of policy approaches, including support for the development of partnerships at the local community level and engaging community stakeholders in decision making to ensure that services meet local needs, and that the value of government investment is maximised.

This trend towards localism is consistent with the Australian Government's policy direction for smaller government and improving services by empowering local communities and supporting them to coordinate effort, harness community resources and work together to achieve change. Cross-sector collaboration is the key to productive and cohesive local communities and governments around the world are increasingly aware that addressing the collaboration challenge is an imperative for future prosperity.

However, effective collaboration is not easy. In the complex territory of cross-sector partnering, an independent intermediary with expertise in partnership development provides both the catalyst for partnership creation, and the support needed to maximise partnerships' efficiency, sustainability and impact.

Within the context of falling rates of youth participation and growing demand for skilled workers, there is an opportunity for the Australian Government to take a leadership role by funding a network of independent intermediaries to support school, business and community collaboration with a strong focus on building partnerships that improve transitions from school to work and enable all young Australians to reach their full potential.

¹¹ Black, Rosalyn, *Beyond the classroom*, 2008