Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

YOUTH PARTNERSHIPS
COORDINATING SERVICES TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE TO STAY ON TRACK

REFORMING SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE

A DISCUSSION PAPER

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Government is currently reviewing investments to order to improve service delivery and better align resources and interventions for vulnerable children and young people. The *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry* and the subsequent Victoria's Vulnerable Children directions paper, *Our Shared Responsibility*, has identified five key action areas that will feed into a final reform strategy to be released in 2013.

The directions paper acknowledges that education and training are critical to an individual's life chances, and that education is a pathway out of poverty and intergenerational disadvantage. One of the key action areas is specifically focused on *Enhancing Education and Capacity Building.*

To this end the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is seeking opportunities to align existing effort and work with program stakeholders to provide a contemporary program and policy environment that will better engage vulnerable young people in learning.

Research highlights that there are continuing challenges in this area:

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data 2011 indicates that of the total number of 355,460 Victorian young people aged 15-19 years, 36,612 are not in education, training or employment[1]. This equates to 10.3% of the population of Victorian young people
- A Deloitte report in 2012 found there are approximately 290,000 15 year olds in Australia today. If current early school leaving rates continue, 70,000 or 21% of these students would leave school before completion in 2016.[2]
- In March 2011 there were 469 young people in Residential Care, educational data is available on 368 of these young people, of the 368:
  - 260 children in residential care are enrolled in education.
  - 111 of these attend school less than 5 days a week.
  - 108 children in residential care are not in education.

PURPOSE OF THE DISCUSSION PAPER

The purpose of this discussion paper is to seek comment on a new approach to supporting all young people in learning, specifically those that have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education settings.

The intention of the new approach is to build on the strengths of **existing DEECD programs** and governance structures, streamline connections between programs and combine a contemporary understanding of best practice through **recent research** concerned with and involving vulnerable young people.

[1] The ABS define *not in education, training or employment* as: People who, in the survey reference week, were not studying or working (and therefore either unemployed or not in the labour force); or studying part-time and not working (therefore unemployed or not in the labour force); or not studying but in part-time work.

[2] Deloitte Access Economics, The Socio Economic Benefits of Investing in the Prevention of Early School Leaving (2012)

Existing DEECD Programs

The Department of Education and Early Childhood (DEECD) has a wide range of programs that support young people to fully engage in learning, some of which are targeted at particular cohorts, particular learning and development needs, and others that focus on vulnerability where there is a high risk of disengagement.

- **Re-engagement Programs** - that target youth who are disengaged or are at risk of disengagement from the mainstream system (including youth in statutory care).
- **Transition Programs** - transition programs that support students, some of which are at risk of disengaging, to successfully transition into post-secondary school education, training or employment.
- **Health and Wellbeing Programs** – that target numerous health and wellbeing needs of vulnerable young people at risk of disengaging from school, including Student Support Service staff.
- **Indigenous Programs** – that support participation and engagement of Koorie students, including Koori Education Support staff.
- **English as an Additional Language Programs** – that support language development for refugee and other culturally and linguistically diverse students.

One of the programs that has specifically focused on vulnerable young people for the past fourteen years is the **School Focused Youth Service (SFYS)** program.

The aim of the SFYS has been to strengthen support for 10 to 18 year-old vulnerable children and young people by facilitating partnerships and coordinating projects between schools and local community service organisations. The SFYS supports a wide range of interventions designed to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors to assist learning, development, health and wellbeing.

The last financial year saw SFYS activity involving:

- 40,017 young people, primarily Australian born (36,312)
- 39,810 young people involved in projects and 207 young people received individual brokerage.
- The most common risk factor for young people receiving a service was depressed mood and depressive disorders (10,444).
- The next most common risk factors were social and geographical isolation (7,462), early school leaving and school failure (6,575), violence (4,580), sexuality and sexual behaviour (2,750), culturally and linguistically diverse young people (2,620) and socioeconomic disadvantage (1,602).
- Of the 2,139 Government, Independent and Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools in Victoria, 707 schools were involved with SFYS, 566 of these were Government schools.

Recent Discussions, Consultation and Research

The new approach proposed in this Discussion Paper has considered the outcomes from:

- Discussions with agencies providing or interested in the provision of the School Focused Youth Service program, including community and youth peak bodies, school principal associations, representatives of Catholic Education and Independent Schools, local government and senior staff members of community sector organisations.

- Consultation with vulnerable groups of young people who have experienced disengagement from education to understand their views on reforms to the system.

- Research involving agencies and government departments regarding current funding arrangements for vulnerable young people with a view to understanding what limitations are created by funding arrangements and how this might be addressed.

- An analysis of the Youth Partnerships governance groups and local stakeholders to determine whether the new governance arrangements have added value and improved responses for vulnerable young people.

- A review of the Local Learning and Employment Network model of network or partnership approaches that support successful transition outcomes for young people, including those most at risk of disengaging.

- Consultation with Local Government to determine their current role in supporting vulnerable young people and understand from their perspective the potential for their role in an improved systemic response to vulnerable young people.

OUTCOMES OF DISCUSSION WITH SFYS PROVIDERS TO DATE

DEECD has held preliminary discussions with approximately 100 representatives of community sector, local government and principal associations since a new approach to providing support for vulnerable young people was announced in November 2012.

The discussions sought input to the following questions:

- Objectives to inform the focus of the new approach

- Strengths and learnings from existing programs to inform the characteristics of a new approach

A summary of the outcomes of the discussion is included in the table below.

Objectives of a New Approach	**Potential characteristics of new approach**
• Building resilience • Attendance / retention / engagement • Responses that span prevention, early intervention and intervention • Building the capacity of schools to respond • Addressing inequities	**Local** • Approach to be informed by a program logic • Data and evidence based not driven by funding eligibility criteria • Single point of contact for all wellbeing issues **Partnerships** • Integrated birth to exit approach • Strong, structured, accountable partnerships between agencies, schools and families **Independent** • Universal • Flexible and local • Supported and skilled workforce **Accountable** • Clear governance structures • Performance frameworks • Evidence of school linkage

PROPOSED NEW APPROACH

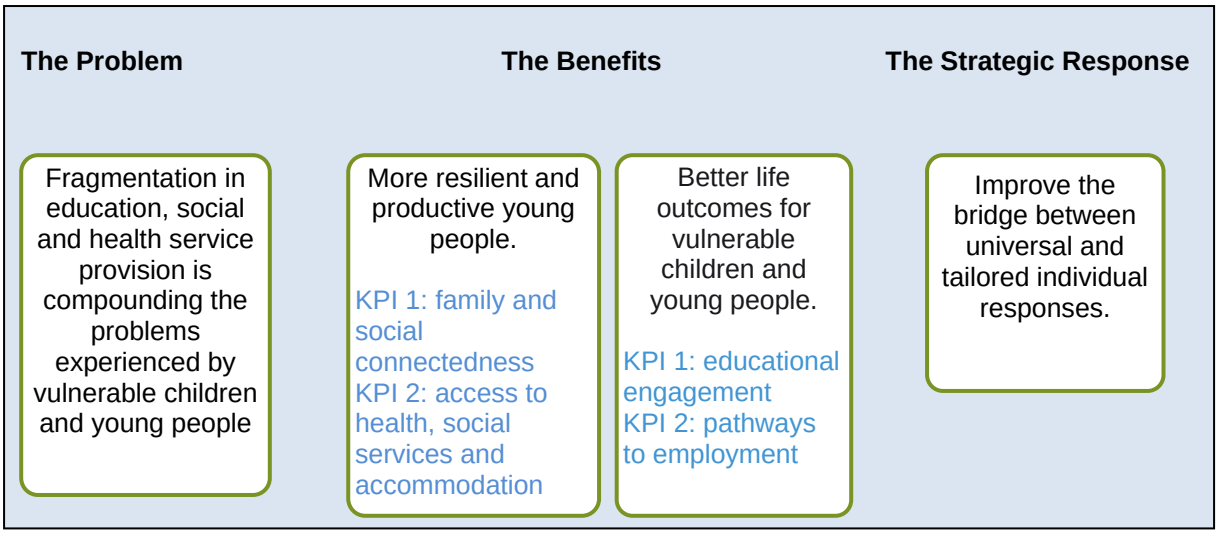
The outcomes of the discussion have been incorporated with an investment logic discussion and findings from recent research to form a potential approach for your consideration.

Objectives

- It is proposed that a new approach creates seamless connections between external services and the education workforce to improve young people's engagement with education and training and promote positive mental health and wellbeing with the objectives of:
    - Strengthening the capacity of vulnerable young people to better engage with and participate in learning.
    - Strengthen the capacity of schools and agencies to collectively re-engage vulnerable groups of young people in learning pathways.

Scoping a New Approach

In scoping a new approach to support vulnerable children and young people this paper describes the problem, the benefits we are seeking to achieve and how they would be measured, along with a proposed strategic approach.



Please provide your feedback/suggestions to inform the scoping of a new approach. Limit of 150 words per question.

Are there any other issues that should be considered when describing the problem/current context for vulnerable children and young people?

In scoping a new approach to support vulnerable children and young people are there additional Benefits/Key Performance Indicators that could be included?

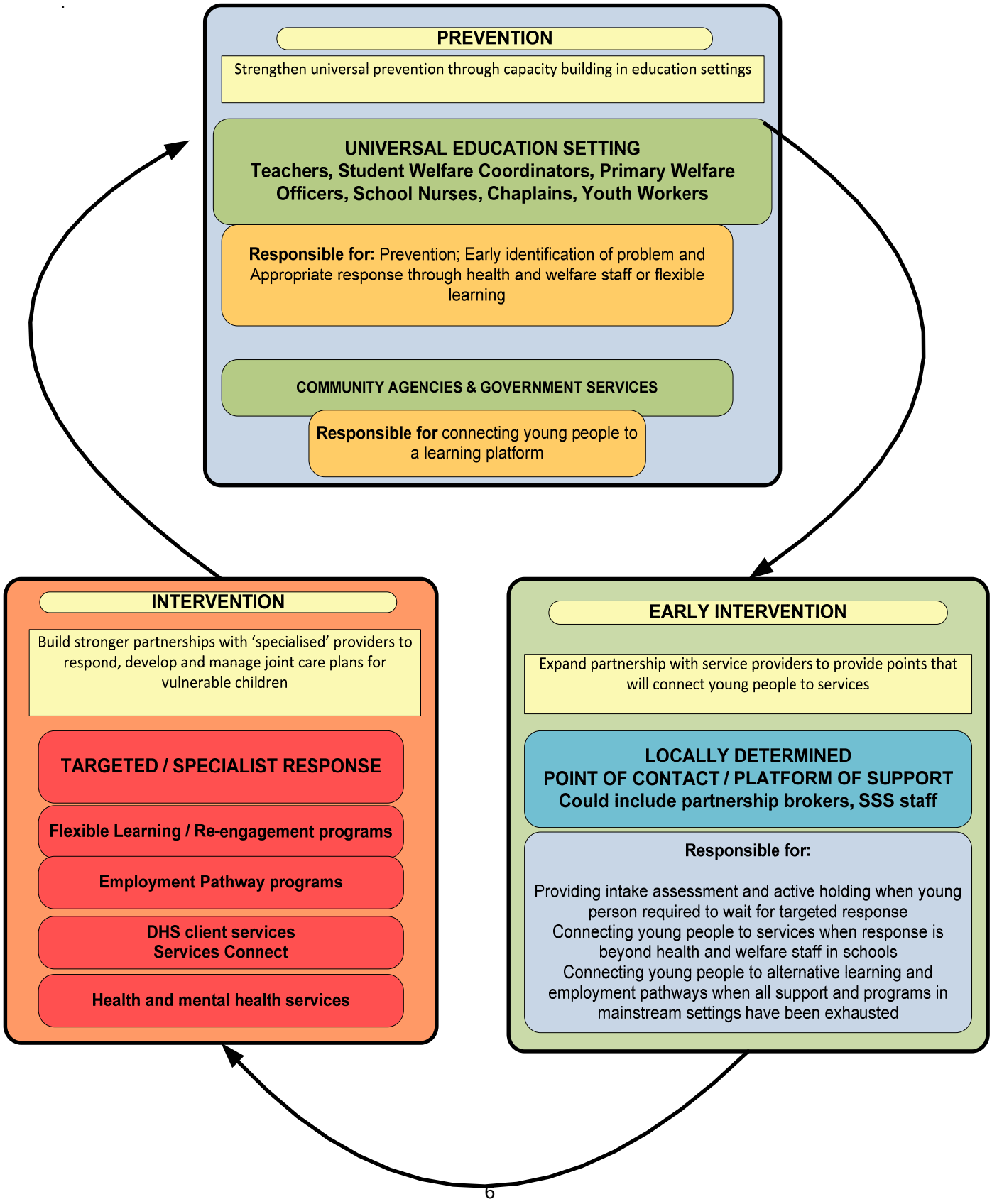
Are there additional strategic responses that should be considered in developing a new approach and achieving the benefits?

Additional comments relating to the scoping of a new approach

Functions of a New Approach

The strategic response will require change that leverages the strengths of current activity and allows for the characteristics identified in the consultations to date to inform how the new approach will be implemented to make the changes required. Proposed functions of a new approach to support vulnerable children and young people aged 8 – 18 years are outlined in the diagram below.

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We invite your feedback on the proposed functions of a new approach. Please limit responses to 150 words per question

Along the continuum of prevention, early intervention and intervention, are there any gaps/opportunities to consider in the proposed functions of a new approach and the key responsibilities at each level?

A new approach will support young people during key transition points, enabling smooth and seamless delivery of services across early childhood, schooling and higher education. Please indicate your level of support for a new approach targeting vulnerable children and young people **aged 8 – 18 years.** Please provide a rationale for consideration of a different age cohort.

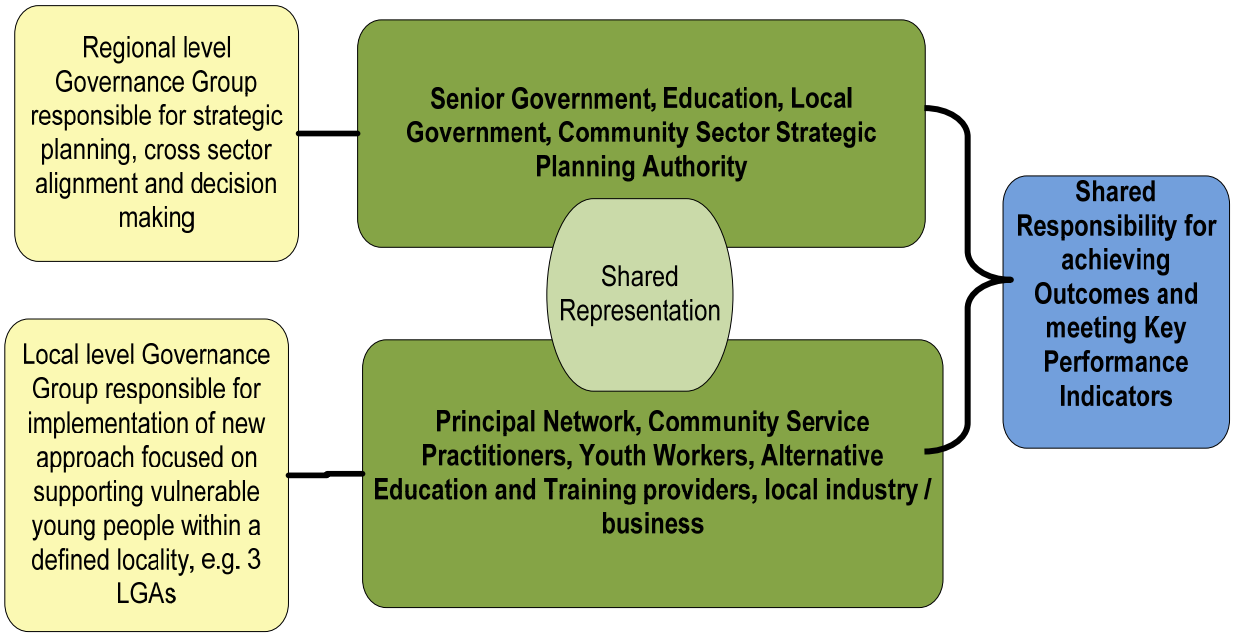
The new approach intends to create a single point that young people and agencies can use to access the range of pathways required to support vulnerable groups of young people. This will require formal partnerships that connect universal settings and a range of targeted providers. For example the partnerships should be able to connect to employment pathways or pathways to improved health and wellbeing that will enable engagement in learning. Do you have a view on this partnership approach?

Additional comments relating to the functions of a new approach

Governance of a New Approach

Governance of the new approach will be required to support local independence and engage a senior commitment from across Government and agencies to better connect strategic and local planning and implementation.

The governance arrangement will also be required to formalise partnerships at a decision making and implementation level.



This governance approach will be expected to bring together some current networks and governance groups with a view to collaborative area based planning and service delivery. Do you have any views on the geographical size of a local area?

The local level governance group for the implementation of this new approach is proposed to operate as a working group of the Regional level governance group with a focus on vulnerable young people. Do you have a view on how the membership of the local level group should be compiled?

What is your view on broadening the focus of the Regional Level Governance Group to consider the education and training needs of all young people?

Additional Comments relating to the governance of a new approach

Please email your response to Kim Wilson at the Youth Partnerships Secretariat via email; wilson.kim.l@edumail.vic.gov.au by Friday February 22nd 2013.

Next Steps

Your contribution will be incorporated to inform a refined approach to vulnerable young people for further discussion with peak agencies early in 2013.