

# 2022 EDUCATION STATE FORUM: SCHOOLS DAY

11 AUGUST 2022

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The Education State Forum – Schools Day, themed **Wellbeing, workforce and pathways: new perspectives on education**, was held on 11 August 2022. Approximately 120 participants came together from across Victoria to attend the in-person event. Participants included members of the Education State in Schools Guiding Coalition, the Australian Education Union, principals, teachers, students, parents, education sector partners and department colleagues.

The objectives of the day were to:

- Bring together key stakeholders, Department of Education and Training staff and educators to build on progress made to create a high performing education system for all Victoria's young people
- Introduce the new Minister for Education and her key priorities to key stakeholders.

In the opening plenary, **Natalie Hutchins, Minister for Education and Minister for Women**, spoke about her background in the portfolios of Industrial Relations, Crime Prevention, Aboriginal Affairs and Local Government. In her new role as Minister for Education, Minister Hutchins described workforce development as her key priority and outlined the government's actions and budget commitments in this space. The Minister spoke about the significant Senior Secondary Pathways reforms and noted that student wellbeing is at the centre of the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO 2.0). Finally, the Minister committed to promoting teaching as a great career choice for school leavers, career changers and new migrants.

In the keynote address, **Professor Jim Watterston, Dean, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne** presented on how strong partnerships between universities, governments, schools and unions could effectively address Australia's acute teacher shortage and declining numbers of people training as teachers. Jim described strategies to build optimal partnerships, including committing to mutual obligations and shared research.

## Workshop one: Workforce

The objective of workshop one was to identify actions to address workforce supply challenges at the school and system level. Stephanie Speck, Executive Director and Chief Communications Officer, shared observations drawn from recruitment campaign data and research, and encouraged participants to discuss what needs to change to improve recruitment and retention. Peter Langham, Principal, Monterey Secondary College, highlighted successful recruitment tools used in his school. Anne-Maree Kliman, Principal, Tarneit P-9 College, provided insight into current workforce challenges and solutions, and strategies to retain quality staff. Tom Cain, Assistant Principal, Monterey Secondary College, described his experience of pivoting to teaching mid-career and shared what led him to make the decision.

Finally, Tony Bugden, Executive Director, Schools Human Resources Division, articulated what is needed to support the attraction, retention, and quality of the teaching workforce, and the short and long term focuses of the Schools Workforce Group, a division within DET newly established to address these issues.

## Key messages from workshop conversations

- **Building a high-quality workforce:** Participants recognised the significant challenges schools face in attracting and recruiting new staff. They noted that there are opportunities across all sectors that have vacancies and similar salaries, so teachers have choice. There is also a lack of allied health professionals in schools which is particularly pronounced in rural areas. Considering this, participants want our schools to be exciting and engaging places to work in order to retain staff.
- **How to attract and retain staff:** Participants noted that it is vital to build a good school culture. This is multi-faceted and includes creating more time for teachers to teach (such as through reducing the

administration burden), supporting teacher wellbeing, providing access to professional development and improving flexibility. Other ideas include providing additional incentives to teach in specialist schools, expanding funding and training for business managers and administration staff to effectively support teachers, and providing funding for Learning Specialists, Leading Teachers and Assistant Principals to mentor new teachers.

- **Opportunities for change:** Participants discussed the need for a multi-faceted approach to promoting teaching as an attractive career choice. Strategies include more communication campaigns, sharing more positive case studies and continued advocacy for better media representation of the teaching profession. Some participants noted that a centralised recruitment process could be effective. Financial and other incentives to work in rural/regional areas and the establishment of a HECS-free program or scholarships to study teaching could also be effective.

## Workshop two: FISO 2.0 – Learning and Wellbeing

Justin McDonnell, Executive Director, Mental Health Reform Division, facilitated the second workshop on the release of FISO 2.0 and how the Mental Health Reforms are elevating the importance of student wellbeing. The objective of this workshop was to identify ways to best support schools to implement FISO 2.0 and to embed a culture of positive student mental health and wellbeing.

Deborah Harman, Principal and Tegan Knuckey and Hamish Anderson, Assistant Principals, Balwyn High School spoke about how Balwyn High promotes student voice and uses formative assessment to support student wellbeing. Jodie Binion, Assistant Principal, Student Wellbeing, and Griffin Errey, Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, Woodville Primary School, Hoppers Crossing spoke about how they have built student and staff mental health capability, including by implementing the *Mental Health in Primary Schools program*.

### Key messages from workshop conversations

- **Embedding a positive culture in schools:** Participants noted that introducing wellbeing into classrooms does not have to be difficult or require major changes to existing practice. Where possible, schools can promote wellbeing and act early when students have mental health and wellbeing concerns. Resources should be directed to the most vulnerable students. Teachers are in a unique position to identify the early warning signs of student mental health concerns, and they can be supported to deepen existing practices and to reflect on their progress.
- **Supporting student voice and agency:** Participants noted the many challenges to student mental health and wellbeing, including cyber safety, peer pressure and family mental health issues. Strategies that help students include tools to make emotions explicit, predictability in the classroom, opportunities for reflection and building self-regulation skills. In delivering services to students, confidentiality and safe spaces in schools are important and where possible, schools may consider the benefits of off-site counselling.
- **Formative assessment:** Participants discussed the importance of high-quality formative assessment and how good interventions can be designed based on data. Further, data extracted from formative assessments can provide evidence of the success of interventions, leading to teacher satisfaction and perseverance.
- **Partnerships between schools and families:** Schools have the opportunity to further develop partnerships with families that were forged during periods of remote learning. In working with families, culturally appropriate practices are important to ensure wellbeing support is delivered effectively.

## Workshop three: Senior Secondary Pathways Reform

The third workshop explored how parents, students, the education system and the wider community can better celebrate and promote vocational and applied learning pathways. Scott Widmer, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Senior Secondary Pathways Reform Taskforce, provided an overview of the changes to senior secondary education commencing in 2023, including the need to overturn entrenched perceptions of vocational pathways. Kevin Murphy, Principal, Wantirna College, described the school's strong student participation in VCAL, and how the school actively celebrates all pathways equally. Hannah Valenti, VET Champion, shared her lived experience of taking a VCAL pathway and her enthusiasm for the program.

### Key messages from workshop conversations

- **Valuing vocational and applied learning (VAL) pathways:** Participants discussed the need for a multi-faceted approach to promoting VAL pathways and reducing stigma, including recruiting a skilled VAL workforce and using effective communication strategies. Diverse audiences should be targeted, including CALD communities. It was agreed that students need accurate information about VAL that is offered early in primary school and the middle years. Career advisors also have a role to play.

VAL learning spaces may benefit from being located in the centre of the school, and being intentional and visible. Schools should continue to have high expectations of VET, VCE Vocational Major and Victorian Pathways Certificate students. The education system needs to ensure that students have ongoing access to practical and applied learning, and schools can build links with employers and industry and teach practical skills.

- **Addressing misperceptions:** Participants spoke about how parents are often the biggest influence on students; however, the broader community also needs to be involved in changing perceptions. The department can continue to take a lead role in raising awareness about different pathways, sharing research and promoting the new VAL offerings in the wider community. Language is important when speaking about students who take alternative pathways.

### Forum reflection

To close the forum, Victorian Student Representative Council students Aakriti Malhotra and Joseph Monitto, and Rural Youth Ambassador Sophie Evans shared their reflections and key takeaways from the day.

Thank you to all involved in the **2022 Education State Forum**. The forum enabled us to harness our collective skills and experience and build a shared sense of urgency to address challenges facing the school system in Victoria. Thank you to panel members and attendees for your valuable participation and support of a shared vision for the future of Victorian education.

### Final comments from participants:

*Feedback from respondents indicated that all participants agreed that the in-person forum strengthened their sense of belonging to the education system, and they left the event energised to take action.*

*"[The workshop on workforce was the most valuable] because it is important to really see how widespread this issue is and how deeply it is impacting the number of applicants to jobs in schools."*

*"The panel and table discussions crystallised what our organisation needs to action with an upcoming state election in order to address challenges our schools and families are dealing with. We will continue to ramp up communication supports for parents."*

*"[Our organisation will] continue to build connections with other stakeholders and drive action collectively."*

*"[Our school will] look to [adopt] Balwyn High School's model and well-being approach."*

*"I left with a feeling that education is in good hands."*