



High School and College Consultation
ACT Department of Education and Training
GPO Box 158
CANBERRA ACT 2601

7 September 2010

To the Department of Education and Training;

On behalf of the Youth Coalition of the ACT (the Youth Coalition), I would like to thank the Department of Education and Training (DET) for the opportunity to input into the *Improving ACT Public High Schools and Colleges Discussion Paper*.

About the Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. Comprised of 90 members, programs, and individuals the Youth Coalition is responsible for representing and promoting the interests and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25 years and those who work with them.

The Youth Coalition is represented on many ACT Government advisory structures and provides advice to the ACT Government on youth issues, along with providing information to youth services about policy and program matters.

A key role of the Youth Coalition is the development and analysis of ACT social policy and program decisions for young people and youth services. The Youth Coalition facilitates the development of strong linkages and promotes collaboration between the community, government and private sectors to achieve better outcomes for young people in the ACT.

Response to the *Improving ACT Public High Schools and Colleges Discussion Paper*

The Youth Coalition reviewed the Discussion paper and commends DET for its ongoing commitment to community consultation and innovation in school settings and education in the ACT.

Please find below a brief response to each of the focus questions provided by DET.

1) What needs to be strengthened or changed so that ACT public schools and colleges are schools of choice?

The Youth Coalition believes that ACT schools need to talk to and listen to students about their beliefs of what makes a school or college their educational provider of choice. The recently released survey entitled 'Tell Us', published by the Foundation for Young Australians, had over 10,000 respondents from secondary students across Australia. The majority of respondents did not feel that their school listened to what they had to say about their education, however over half also reported that school helps them reach their full potential, and helps them develop their most important

skills. The Youth Coalition believes this indicates the importance young people place on their schools and colleges, but also highlights feelings of disempowerment.

The Youth Coalition recommend DET engage in meaningful consultation with ACT students to identify what makes a school or college attractive to them.

2) What needs to be done in ACT public schools and colleges to improve school graduation rates and ensure every student has a pathway to tertiary education and training or meaningful work?

The Youth Coalition commends DET on much of the work already under way to support students to graduate, and create pathways to further training or work. Of particular concern, however, is the low graduation rate for young people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. We believe that this issue requires ongoing focus and leadership from DET, and other stakeholders.

Other marginalised or disadvantaged students also require more support to transition from primary to secondary school, and then to colleges, and these students are not always visible to teaching staff. For example young carers, students with mental health issues or victims of abuse are known to 'fall through the gaps' of service providers and education staff, often not coming to the attention of services until the personal circumstances of the young person become unmanageable. The Youth Coalition recommend increasing the role and responsibilities of school based youth workers, and strongly encourage DET to employ school based youth workers in colleges across the ACT.

3) How can ACT public high schools and colleges be better connected to other education providers and the community to extend choice and opportunity for all students?

The Youth Coalition would like to acknowledge the positive efforts being made by DET to increase effective collaboration and promote sustainable, cross sectoral relationships with stakeholders. We believe that increased collaboration with diverse range of providers, for example youth centres, unions, local business, and private Registered Training Organisations, will extend choice and opportunity for students. We repeat our recommendation that DET continues to engage in a meaningful manner with students of all backgrounds, to better understand the needs and wants of young people will inform DET, and will in turn help to provide flexible and desirable pathways.

4) Where are the opportunities for innovation and growth that will ensure the ACT public school system is meeting the needs and aspirations of our students and the broader ACT community?

The Youth Coalition looks forward to engaging with DET and the youth sector in the future as the responses from this discussion paper are developed. We believe in innovative technologies being used to assist and support young people's education, and to potentially overcome barriers such as disabilities, access and learning environments.

The Youth Coalition would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department of Education to support the youth sector to have input into improving ACT schools.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on (02) 6247 3540 or at director@youthcoalition.net if you wish to discuss this letter further.

Sincerely,

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