

MAKING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING WORK

FOR WORKING VICTORIANS

VICTORIAN TRADES HALL COUNCIL
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1. INTRODUCTION

Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) was founded in 1856 and is the peak body for unions in Victoria. VTHC represents over 40 unions and more than 430,000 workers in the state. These workers are members of unions that reach into every industry across Victoria, both in the public and private sectors.

Since gaining the Eight Hour Day in 1856, VTHC has had a long history of fighting for and defending the rights of workers in Victoria. VTHC will continue to campaign tirelessly for the rights, entitlements and protections of workers, no matter their employment status, employer or workplace.

Few, if any workplace rights have been won without the involvement of the Victorian union movement. This includes:

- The Eight Hour Day,
- The minimum wage,
- The 38-hour work week,
- Superannuation,
- Access to Medicare,
- Occupational health and safety (OHS) protections,
- Parental leave, and
- Family and domestic violence leave.

VTHC and its affiliates know that fundamental skills training for working people is key to ensuring they have secure jobs, good pay and good work. Victorian unions have a long history of contributing to the broader VET system and fighting for training to provide long-term benefits to working people. High quality vocational training has always been a priority of the Victorian union movement, from the Working Men's College to working with TAFEs and establishing union run registered training organisations.

Vocational education and training is a key element of public education forming the foundations of fairness and decency in the society and democracy inherent to Victoria. Notwithstanding the private benefits to workers, vocational education is a public good that benefits the community as a collective.

Any analysis of Victoria's economy should be built off a fundamental respect for the valuable contributions of working people. Expanding and improving VET qualifications is a core component of this. Victoria should have a VET system where working people have the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations. Workers in union know what a VET system at its very best can look like, and this review is the moment to make that a reality.

While VTHC welcomes the Andrews Government's previous and ongoing programs to improve the VET system and TAFEs across the state, vocational education and its institutions, has for decades been in flux. The system has suffered from privatisation, outsourcing, funding shortfalls and constant tinkering. Victoria's vocational training system is failing working people, as it's underfunded, too complicated, too expensive, used by some employers as a tool for exploitation, and does not provide adequate support to students.

Within the VET system, many employers have not been contributing their fair share, often missing in action when it comes to meaningful long-term development of the system, whilst eager to take advantage of the system. Vocational education and training is increasingly being designed to cater to employers' short-term needs to drive profit, rather

THE WORKING MEN'S COLLEGE

Victorian unions have a long and proud history of engagement with vocational education. The Melbourne Working Men's College was founded at Trades Hall in 1887, with a £5000 grant donated by parliamentarian and prominent workers' rights advocate, Francis Ormond. The Executive of the then Melbourne Trades Hall matched this donation, to begin work on opening the college.

The college was founded on the strong belief that the training and education of working people is a foundational pillar in the struggle for workers justice.

Over 600 workers enrolled in the college within the first two months of its opening. Enrolments continued to expand overtime as women were also encouraged to enrol to study. Students were offered a variety of subjects; from bookkeeping and mechanics, to elocution, and dressmaking. The college expanded into business, engineering and the fine arts and eventually became RMIT, which is a central part of the Melbourne CBD today.

Vocational education has always been central to the work of Victorian unions. VTHC believes that carrying on the legacy of ensuring workers have access to quality vocational education is integral to achieving justice for working people.

than the long-term well-being of the workforce. Employers have an important role to play in the genuine development of workers' foundational skills and knowledge, both through providing placements and contributing to curriculum for the long-term benefit of a resilient, sustainable workforce. However, they have been ignoring these obligations and outsourcing much of the training that should take place at work to publicly funded private-RTOs, while still gaining the benefit from the cheaper wages associated with apprentices, trainees and students on placement, as well as the increased skills and knowledge of workers post-qualification.

The benefits associated with VET qualifications are flowing in the wrong direction, and it is time to ensure that instead, vocational education and training is made to work for working people.

Reforms resulting from this review must prioritise creating a fair and equitable system for workers and ensure that government funded vocational education is equipped to provide working people with the skills training they need to succeed. Changes must be for the long term, uncomplicated so that vocational education is accessible and can be a mechanism to address inequality. The benefits these changes bring will then flow to employers, and to industry.

The key to creating a VET system that works for working people is re-aligning its focus on quality public education that approaches outcomes for students and workers holistically. TAFEs should receive, at a minimum, 70% of public funds, and for TAFEs across Victoria to have a more harmonised, and less competitive approach. Enhancing the value and respect of TAFE teachers is critical. Support and professional staff are also key to well-functioning institutions that support students and forge innovative approaches with industry. The Victorian Government should play an increased role in ensuring the system is not manipulated nor contributes to exploitation of young and vulnerable workers, and instead is used to create meaningful opportunities for working people.

In section 3 of this report, VTHC outlines the key principles that should underpin the VET system. While this report is specific to Victoria, the recommendations drive at fixing the major issues for working people and may be directed at structures established by both the state and federal governments. This report makes over 40 recommendations based on these key principles, that will ensure vocational education works for Victorian workers.

2. WORKING PEOPLE RELY ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

VET is the domain of working people and VET institutions enable working Victorians to access education and develop their technical knowledge and skills, together with a long term understanding of their industry and skill set.

The Skills for Growing Victoria's Economy Issues Paper gathers demographic data that demonstrates how the VET system is being utilised by working Victorians.¹ It shows that VET enrolments have a generally even age spread; with 35% of enrolments being aged 24 years or under, 41% aged 25 to 44, and 24% 45 years or older. This is much more even across the age groups compared to higher education where 69% of all enrolments are aged 24 years or below.

There were also more enrolments in VET courses; 699,000 for the year 2018, compared to 454,275 for higher education, demonstrating the fundamental importance of the VET sector. There is also a generally good rate of regional VET enrolments; 28% of enrolments are delivered in Victoria's regions compared to 17% for university enrolments. There is however an uneven gender spread for VET enrolments; 45% of which are women. Enrolments for higher education are almost the opposite, with 54% of enrolments being women.

Just under one quarter of Victorian workers have on a VET qualification. According to the latest Census figures, 23.7% of Victorians held either a Certificate I, II, III, or IV, Diploma or Advanced Diploma as their highest qualification. This is comparable to university qualifications, where 24.3% of Victorians have a bachelor's degree or higher.

VET qualifications generally provide working people with a secure job, with good wages, enabling a good quality of life.

LIAM, WERRIBEE, 26

Liam completed his apprenticeship in carpentry in 2019 with Pro Build. Since then, he has been identified as a potential manager, and he is undergoing Pro Build's Junior Supervisor Program. As part of this, he's enrolled in the Diploma at RMIT.

Liam says his trade has allowed him to have "the most secure job out of any of [his] mates."

He says "I can go out and do whatever I want to do; I can go buy a car or whatever I want and know I have the job security to be able to pay for it. It's important, especially now with everything being so uncertain. I have mates who have been laid off and are looking for another employer, whereas I've been with the same employer for five years."

MONIQUE, 22, WARRANDYTE

Monique is a third-year carpentry apprentice, who is very close to finishing her trade. She's found her apprenticeship to be extremely rewarding so far, having been exposed to a range of skills which has allowed her to have a deep understanding of the structural nature of her work. For Monique, the right support was integral to her finding her feet. She went through the CFMEU training unit and was well supported by the team there, who helped her find the right company for her apprenticeship. She was the only woman in her class but was quickly identified as a leader; in part because of her organised attitude towards work, and her approachable nature.

Monique always wanted to be a carpenter. She knew she wasn't academically minded and worked from year 7 to get into a position where she could undertake her carpentry apprenticeship. When she was young her parents thought she would change her mind. They soon came around and supported her to get into the CFMEU training unit.

Monique went from being the only woman in her class of ten, to the only woman on site of 350 men, but she says she hasn't had a problem.

"Although I didn't feel confident to begin with, the boys let me know they had my support and it made me feel

comfortable and I started being able to open up and be my approachable self on site. Now I know I can have a joke with them, and if they cross the line, I can put them in their place, but I've never had that problem."

She says the right school and the right support for her was key to getting the right job. Monique's contract is for four years and she says she's grateful, particularly with the downturn from COVID-19. She's still working, and says, "I'm very grateful for this job, I have a good income and it's allowed me to be able to buy a house. I've had the right support and if anything goes wrong, I know how to fix it, and who to turn to."

Based on Census figures from 2016, for both men and women workers across Australia, 95% of those with a diploma were employed, and for men 95% with a Certificate level qualification were employed, compared to 93% for women workers. This compares very well with those who hold a bachelor's degree, 96% of whom were employed.

Industries such as manufacturing, construction, health care and social assistance, and retail trade have the highest concentration of workers with VET qualifications. As the nature of work changes, these industries will become increasingly important, as workers come to rely on them for the provision of services into the future.

Below outlines the numerical spread of workers and their qualifications by industry in Australia:²

	Bachelor Degree or Higher '000	Diploma '000	Certificate Qualifications '000
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	19.2	9.1	28.5
Mining	53.4	18.7	77.9
Manufacturing	157.7	72.1	211.1
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	49.8	9.9	40.3
Construction	102.8	60.2	248.8
Wholesale trade	77.6	35.1	71.7
Retail trade	189.7	100.9	160.8
Accommodation and food services	129.3	75.5	99.5
Transport, postal and warehousing	95.5	60.3	114.6
Information media & telecommunications	90.1	21.5	23.6
Financial and insurance services	214.0	47.3	37.3
Rental, hiring and real estate services	50.0	20.7	29.0
Professional, scientific & technical services	546.8	85.5	71.3
Administrative and support services	105.2	37.2	53.6
Public administration and safety	344.3	122.0	113.7
Education and training	681.7	102.1	105.5
Health care and social assistance	707.3	229.6	286.5
Arts and recreation services	61.6	14.3	37.0
Other services	19.2	9.1	28.5

The ABS measures casual work through whether or not a worker has access to leave. On this analysis, workers with a VET qualification are more likely to be employed securely, which means they do have leave entitlements. For example, 82% of workers with a Certificate II or III have access to leave entitlements, and a further 84% of workers with a Diploma have this access. This is similar to university qualifications; with 85% of workers with a bachelor degree or higher having access to leave provisions.

This is important, as a study from the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) found that over one-third of workers across Australia are employed in some form of insecure work arrangement; be it in casual work, through the gig economy or through sham contracting. Insecure work is a problem severely affecting low-paid working people. By the ABS analysis, 37.7% of workers without any qualification have no access to leave entitlements, and 24.5% of workers who are employed through a relationship of employment (i.e., workers who are not sole traders, business owners or gig economy workers etc.) have no access to leave entitlements.

Working people with VET qualifications are also more likely to be in a medium wage bracket. For example, of workers who earn \$85 an hour or more, 77% have a VET qualification. Further, 70% of workers who earn between \$55-\$65 an hour hold a VET qualification, 68% in the \$65-\$75 wage bracket, and 72% in the \$75-\$85 an hour wage bracket.

While VET qualifications can be a critical component of ensuring workers earn good wages, the rates of students completing their qualifications are dropping, and the rates of working people having access to these opportunities is diminishing. Workers without any qualifications are more likely to earn under \$35 an hour, with 35.7% of total workers in the \$25-\$35 an hour earning bracket having no qualification. Here, nearly 72% of workers with no qualification earn under \$15 an hour, and 52.4% of those who earn \$15-\$25 an hour hold no qualification.

While union density is a major factor in addressing insecure work and low wages, the qualifications derived from vocational education and training play a vital role in ensuring workers are valued in the workforce. Quality vocational education and training, centred around strong institutions, with respected workforces that provide a holistic approach to VET will ensure economic equality into the future. A model that creates these conditions so it is of the highest quality and creates the jobs that working people deserve must be of the highest priority.

3. VTHC'S PRINCIPLES AND APPROACH TO VET

VTHC has established a set of principles to guide our approach to reform of the vocational education and training system, and to ensure it enhances equality for working people. Any reform to vocational education and training should be compatible with these principles.

3.1 Skills for Working Victorians as a Collective

Vocational education is essential for working people and the rate of skills development will need to increase substantially into the future. Working Victorians deserve to have quality jobs and the relevant training to capably perform the associated work.

Importantly, the skills development of workers should not translate into an individualised onus for competing in a 'labour market'.

For example, The Skills for Growing Victoria's Economy Issues Paper references at multiple points that it is predicted working people will need to undertake an additional 8,000 hours of training until retirement to have the requisite skills to be a part of the workforce into the future. Assuming a worker retires at 67, and begins their working life at 21, this projection will require, on average, at least 3 hours of additional training per week.

If this level of training is required to perform work, it should be undertaken during work time, and not pushed onto workers as individuals.

Over recent years, Australia's system of work has pushed risk onto individual workers. From the increased rate of casual work, outsourcing entitlements such as sick leave to the individual worker, and the over reliance on labour hire that breaks the obligations that come from employment, the rights that should come with being a working person in Victoria have been repeatedly chipped away.

Workers have the right to spend time with their family, pursue hobbies, volunteer and be a part of their community, outside of the workplace. Training to be able to work should not encroach on the time working people have to rest and relax as work becomes more complex into the future.

Training and skills development should be part and parcel with work. Employers must be responsible for taking on part of the obligation to ensure their workers can do the work they assign. To facilitate this the Government should advocate for study leave provisions to be expanded in the National Employment Standards, and should include relevant provisions in all public sector enterprise agreements to model best employment practice. Any effective vocational education and training system must have employers take proper responsibility to provide paid time for ongoing education and training, which is directly linked to workers gaining accredited qualifications.

Additionally, the Government must undertake extensive labour market planning so that training and education can become a mechanism for achieving equality for Victorian workers. It must be ensured that workers who have diminished capacity to undertake training outside of work time due to caring and other responsibilities are denied access to opportunities to progress their careers or advance financially.

Certain communities are more harshly disadvantaged in the workforce. For women, young workers, workers of migrant backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, workers with disabilities and workers from regional areas, the barriers that are present to accessing the workforce, and maintain stable and meaningful employment manifest more acutely and in inter-related ways. This report contains a number of recommendations that would see the vocational education and training system utilised as a means to remove some of these barriers, and to create opportunities for disadvantaged groups to overcome obstacles.

3.2 Gender Equality

Reforms to the vocational education system must address inequality for working women. It should be aligned to overcome gendered violence at work, and remove gender pay gaps and segregation of the workforce to ensure women workers are fairly valued in the Victorian workplace.

This is vital, as industries where women workers are predominant are predicted to be some of the largest growth areas. For example, health care, disability and aged care, childcare, and retail are some of the industries to have the largest amount of growth for education and training into the future. These industries also have some of the highest gender pay gaps, and highest rates of casual and insecure work.

The health care and social assistance industry is an illustrative example of this. It is the most highly segregated industry along gendered lines, as 79% of total workers in this sector are women³. This industry also has some of the highest rates of part-time and insecure work, as 48.3% of the workforce is employed part time, and 16.9% is employed casually⁴. This makes it more difficult for women workers to overcome gender pay gaps, and consequently, the health and social assistance industry has a gender pay gap of 22.3%, the highest of any industry in the country⁵.

While this industry grows and VET supports it, it cannot reinforce the continued undervaluing of women's work and care work. It is critically important the VET plays a role in breaking down the gender norms that are damaging to women workers entering and remaining in the workforce.

There is also still work to be done to encourage women into traditionally male dominated trades. This must start with career guidance counsellors recommending apprentices to all prospective school aged apprentices.

Women workers also face gendered violence in the workplace. Research conducted by VTHC finds a link between gendered norms and women workers being subjected to pervasive gendered violence at work⁶. 64% of Victorian women state they've experienced gendered violence at work, 19% said an 'unsafe work environment' was a key part of their decision to leave their work, and 60% reported feeling "unsafe, uncomfortable or at risk" at work⁷. This research found there was a link between harmful attitudes concerning what behaviours and roles women should embody and violence at work.

Women workers also face the burden of undertaking the majority of caring work, particularly when it comes to childcare. One study found that Australian women undertake 72% of all unpaid work⁸, and another found they spend 64.4% of their working time on unpaid care work⁹. Victorian unions affiliates and the Women Onsite Team, based at VTHC, report that women workers are being excluded from pursuing trades due to the lack of childcare options.

Reform to the vocational education and training system must work to address gender inequality by ensuring women workers

and students can enter male dominated industries, and that female dominated industries gain the value and recognition they deserve.

Reforms should result in a VET system that is accessible and embraces all workers, particularly women. Women workers should be able to undertake trades in traditionally male dominated industries without the threat of gendered violence, and with the support of their union, TAFE, workmates and employer. The rates of women taking up these trades should be close to equal to the male rate of enrolment, and any pay gaps based on gender should cease to exist.

Women workers deserve to have access to the secure and well-paid jobs that high-quality training can deliver. Creating equality for women should be one of the urgent priorities in reforming the VET system.

3.3 A Just Transition for workers

It will be necessary to have the skills ready to meet the evolving needs of the climate and the technologies available to take advantage of this. A transition to an economy that addresses the needs of the climate presents an enormous opportunity to create equality for working people.

A Just Transition framework should be adopted in response to the evolving climate and the effect this will have on workers and industry. This makes it incumbent upon Governments to ensure that working people have the skills and education to share in economic gains from the development of sustainable industries.

A Just Transition approach to VET is one way this can be realised. Reforms should focus on the development of skills and education for expert manufacturing, sustainable energy systems and technical knowledge. The needs of the climate will impact industries in a range of ways, and there's no limit to the innovation of Victorian workers' response.

The Star of the South is a good example of a potential project where the plans are underway to address climate change while creating good jobs. The proposed offshore wind farm near Gippsland has the potential to supply up to 18% of Victoria's electricity sustainably. It is estimated that this project will create 2,000 jobs during the construction phase, with a priority on creating work for the local community¹⁰. This model has enormous potential to be rolled out with the dual purpose of addressing climate change and creating secure well-paid jobs within Victoria's regions.

At the same time, it is of the utmost importance that workers do not lose out. Industry planning and training will be key to ensuring any worker who is adversely affected has the opportunity to share in the new technologies.

Many industries including manufacturing, electricity services, agriculture, and healthcare are already adapting to the changing needs of the climate. TAFEs should be supported to expand partnerships with organisations that are leading the charge in technological advances in Victoria, and be resourced to adapt the curriculum to be ready to address and respond to climate change and provide good jobs for working people.

3.4 Automation

There is concern the Victorian workforce is deeply unprepared for the effects of automation. It is likely that many jobs at the lower end of the skills spectrum will be automated, with little plan of how to protect their livelihoods or retrain them.

A report conducted by McKinsey Australia predicts that up to 46% of jobs could be automated by 2030, leading to an unemployment increase of 2.5%. The risk is especially high for administrative and manual workers in the regional areas or who are socially vulnerable¹¹.

At the same time, the wealth divide will increase in favour of workers who are more highly skilled and employed in knowledge-based occupations. It is predicted that income inequality may increase by up to 30%. Recently, Woolworths announced that it will make over 1,300 workers redundant as it moves towards automated warehouses. This also comes after almost 400 workers at the Hume Woolworths Warehouse in Broadmeadows had their jobs automated in 2018¹². These jobs belonged to the working people who have become an example of how the unfair effects of automation will be concentrated within the workforce¹³.

A reorientation towards skills development for working people can be part of the strategy to counteract the inequality that could result from automation. Development of skills for working people must ensure workers share in the prosperity to be offered by automation, instead of suffering because of it.

3.5 Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning that is for genuine professional and skills development that builds upon full qualifications such as Certificates and Diplomas, or sets up a pathway to obtaining full qualifications should be supported.

Victorian unions are concerned that micro-credentials are being utilised by employers to skirt their obligations in terms of holistic training for workers developing their long-term career prospects and overall skills. Genuine specialisation that builds on a pre-existing skill set would be welcomed by Victorian unions, as would foundational units that could build towards a qualification.

3.6 Addressing Inequality and Insecure Work

The Victorian Government explore should how the VET system can be used to address ever deepening chasms of inequality and the growth of the 'working poor'. Working people suffer insecure jobs, flat wage growth, wage theft and a vast wealth gap. This particularly affects migrant, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, women, and young workers.

The Skills for Growing Victoria's Economy Issues Paper references some of the problems associated with this growing gap, including the growing rates of workers in poverty. In Victoria there has been an 11.6% increase of the homeless population across Victoria over four years¹⁴. Of these, nearly 2 in 5 (39.3%) homeless Victorians were either working or looking for work, having been classified as in the labour force¹⁵.

The rates of insecure work have risen dramatically. Research conducted by the ACTU estimates that 40% of workers across Australia are in some form of insecure or casual work, including gig economy work, labour hire, and sub-contractors on sham contracts.¹⁶ Casual work has grown rapidly recently, after having remained steady around 20% since throughout the 1980's and into the 2010's, the current rate of casual work has increased to 24.6%.¹⁷ This has resulted in Australia having one of the highest rates of casual work in the OECD.

Insecure work, and an over-reliance on casualisation particularly affects working people, with casual work most common amongst low skilled industries.

Wage growth across Victoria has been flat, further driving inequality. Victorian wages have only risen 0.5% during the most recent quarter, and 2.1% over the year¹⁸. Comparatively, annual wage growth during the Global Financial Crisis was 4.2%.¹⁹ Wages growth at the bottom end of the scale have been much flatter compared to the top. Analysis from the Reserve Bank of Australia shows that the wages of those in the top earning quintile grew 34% more quickly per year than those in the bottom quintile, between 2009-2018.²⁰ The Grattan Institute highlights that more than three-quarters of Australian workers earn less than the average full-time wage.²¹ Factoring for unemployment and workers who aren't in paid work, the typical adult's income is \$36,893.39.²²

Analysis shows that income inequality is at a 75- year high.²³ Data that measures income inequality in Australia shows that the lowest quintile earned \$26,884 in 2017-18, 3.3 times lower than the medium income and 10.5 times the highest.²⁴

The wealthiest 10% of Australians owned nearly 33% of all total household wealth, and the wealthiest 20% owned 63% of total household wealth in 2017-18.²⁵ The lowest decile owned less than 0.5% of all household wealth. This disparity has been growing. In 2003-04, the lowest quintile owned 1.4% of total household wealth and this declined to 1.1 in 2011-12, and is now down to 0.8%. By comparison, the highest quintile owned 58.6% in 2003-04, rising to 61.1% in 2011-12, and 63.5% in 2017-18.

There is an intersectional relationship with the groups that are in an economically disadvantaged position, and wealth inequality. For example young workers face significant challenges at work; as 27.4% of young workers are underemployed²⁶, and 1 in 5 young workers suffer wage theft.²⁷ Of international students, a study found 1 in 4 were paid \$12 an hour or less, and some migrant workers were being paid as little as \$5 an hour.²⁸ Women workers are also more likely to be employed part-time, and over a lifetime this has resulted in a 40% gender superannuation pay gap.²⁹

Reform to the VET system is an opportunity to put an end to unnecessary insecurity in Victoria. Increased access to skills and educational training have repeatedly been shown to lead to more secure jobs. The VET system must be used to address the tide of insecure work that has swept Victoria. Importantly, secure jobs with good conditions come from a strong union presence.

4. A UNIFIED TAFE SYSTEM

Currently, there are 12 TAFEs and 4 dual sector institutions, operating as individual entities, competing for students and funding. At the heart of the government's VET policy is a view that competition within the training market will drive efficient, high quality provision.

Victoria's gamble with the marketisation and privatisation of VET has had the opposite effect. Following more than a decade of failures, the marketisation approach must be abandoned. Otherwise, Victorian VET students and the broader workforce will continue to face a lack of consistency, and the inability for the state to ensure workers have the skills to take part in a fair economy. The policy structure of marketisation of working people's training and education is hugely disadvantageous.

Victorian workers report several access and equity issues across TAFEs. There are problems with recognition of prior learning (RPL) across the TAFE systems, with no uniform rule for how previous experience or prior learning is applied. They report that the approach to RPL is sometimes applied not only inconsistently between TAFEs, but within the organisations themselves depending on who they speak to on the day. Affiliated unions have reported that workers within the TAFEs are doing their utmost, but the necessary training and information delivery is systemically lacking.

The rules regarding who can access the Victorian Training Guarantee (VTG) subsidy, including free TAFE are hugely complex for working people, who often do not have access to the support to navigate the system. The VTG is only available to students and workers who are upskilling, with limited access to ongoing subsidies once a course is completed. This is further limited to those who complete a free TAFE course. This means that if a worker has been retrenched and decides to return to training in another field, they are often excluded from access to Free TAFE, because they're not deemed to be upskilling. It also often excludes women who are looking to retrain after caring for children.

The complexity of the system has led students to mistakenly use their access to Free TAFE to complete an initial lower level qualification, such as a pre-apprenticeship, where they are looking to continue into a course such as a Diploma, which inherently attracts higher fees. As they can only access the funded place once, together with the great inconsistency of course costs across TAFEs, many students end up using their entitlement to free TAFE on their less expensive pre-apprenticeship or similar qualifications. As a result they must pay the full cost of an apprenticeship or diploma, which are often in the order of \$10,000. This is a huge upfront cost for working people.

The competitive style of operation of TAFEs, mandated by the marketisation approach to VET drives the complexity of the system. There are funding and management decisions that lead to varied course costs, varied student-teacher contact hour requirements, mixed approach to the curriculum and andragogy, and a wide array of inconsistent support for teachers and students. Depending on where they live and their interests, working people do not have access to the same standard of course, which can put them at a real disadvantage. Employers expect that workers who have gained qualifications from different institutions receive the same program and support, and often end up directing their dissatisfaction towards teachers, rather than the institutional management decisions.

Between TAFE institutes, course costs vary widely. Bendigo Kangan Institute offer a Certificate IV in Disability for \$7771,³⁰ and Melbourne Polytechnic offer the same course for \$11,500³¹. A full-fee, non subsidised Certificate III in Hairdressing at the Box Hill Institute costs \$12,524³², and the same full fee course at GOTAFE costs \$10,199.³³ Similarly, Victoria University Polytechnic offers a full fee Certificate III in Engineering - Mechanical Trade without subsidy or Free TAFE for \$26,000³⁴, and The Gordon Institute of TAFE offers the same course for \$18,912³⁵, a difference of 37.4%.

Victorian unions have reported that there is little oversight and insufficient long-term planning by the government regarding VTG, and funding decisions, especially for for-profit private providers. It is common for private providers to dominate courses where there is a high rate of funding per student contact hour, with relatively low overhead costs. Utilising aggressive marketing tactics, these organisations enrol students in subpar courses, which often have the bare minimum of teaching delivery to maximise a profit.

While TAFEs and Learn Local providers/community RTOs do the best they can, when government responds to these private RTOs by altering the funding model, their ability to plan for and cater to their students is significantly impacted. The approach to reigning in for-profit providers must not be continuing inconsistency, but to remodel VET by placing TAFE in the central role with uncompetitive funding.

The costs associated with VET courses delivered at school are also not uniform. Even where the only course costs passed onto students and their families are for resources, outlaying approximately \$100 can be a significant burden for working people.

The Skills for Growing Victoria's Economy Issues Paper references a number of statistics concerning the outcomes for students that have gone through the VET system in Victoria, particularly in regard to their success rates and likelihood to go on to be employed in their field.

Despite the dedicated and knowledgeable teachers and professional staff within the VET system, the COVID-19 crisis has amplified genuine concerns about the capacity of the institutions to deliver quality education and training to students. It needs to be significantly overhauled, to create a system that works for working people.

However, the COVID-19 situation has led to some TAFEs working together, to share resources and collaborate on curriculum. Victorian unions have seen that a more unified TAFE system can operate in Victoria. This should be the guiding objective so that all working people can access the same high standard of training across the board.

For years, the TAFE and broader vocational education and training system has been tinkered with by successive governments. Victoria has seen the marketisation of TAFEs that completely gutted their capacity to provide the highest quality training and support to students. While this has somewhat been walked back in recent years, TAFEs and their management, curriculum, staffing and support for students are still inconsistent. Working people deserve better.

The TAFE system needs to be overhauled. To reinstate TAFE as a pillar of working people's equality in Victoria, it is necessary to introduce a unified TAFE system that removes the contestable funding model.

A unified TAFE system across Victoria would see the uniformity of things such as the cost of course fees for students, the development and provision of excellent curriculum, the provision of the same standard of equipment and placements to develop skills, well paid teachers and professional staff, and some administrative functions such as marketing and finance. Concurrently, TAFE institutions would have the flexibility to deliver excellent and relevant courses for their communities and retain their sense of identity (see 4.2)

Recommendation 1: *Establish a public, unified TAFE system.*

4.1 The Allocation of Funding

As the public institution responsible for the delivery of the education and training for working people, TAFE must receive the majority of the government's VET funding.

Recommendation 2: *TAFEs receive at least 70% of vocational education and training funding.*

The remaining 30% should be the only contestable funding in the VET system. It should only be able to be contested by TAFEs, Learn Local providers, and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). Only RTOs that can demonstrate they share the same commitment to developing the skills of working people, and a commitment to a well-paid and secure workforce, as TAFEs should be eligible.

To receive funding, these RTOs must meet a set of requirements that demonstrate they are committed to genuinely developing the skills and education of working people. These must be for the purpose of providing the holistic education specified in section 5 below.

Recommendation 3: *The remaining 30% of funding to be contestable, by TAFEs, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) who meet a set of guidelines, and Learn Local providers/community RTOs.*

Recommendation 4: *To be entitled to receive public funding, RTOs must meet strict guidelines that ensure the training in these institutions be at the same quality level expected from public institutions, that should include:*

- a. A holistic approach to vocational education, including a high rate of professional specialist staff,*
- b. Delivery of genuine curriculum for each course,*
- c. Union inductions and workplace rights training within the course,*
- d. A demonstrated commitment to their workforce, including the encouragement of union membership and ongoing, secure work, and*
- e. Placements and apprenticeships with the same contractual standards as TAFEs.*

4.1.1 Registered Training Organisations

There are certain RTOs that provide important training. For example, many of the not-for-profit and union run RTOs provide specialised training for trades tickets. Further, many unions are genuinely developing professional development for working people and training them to have specialised and well-founded skills (see section 6.5).

These not-for-profit and union training centres are the kinds of organisations that should be considered to contest the remaining public VET funding. They have a demonstrated commitment to their community and industry and put the needs of their students and workers first.

4.1.2 Learn Providers and Community RTOs

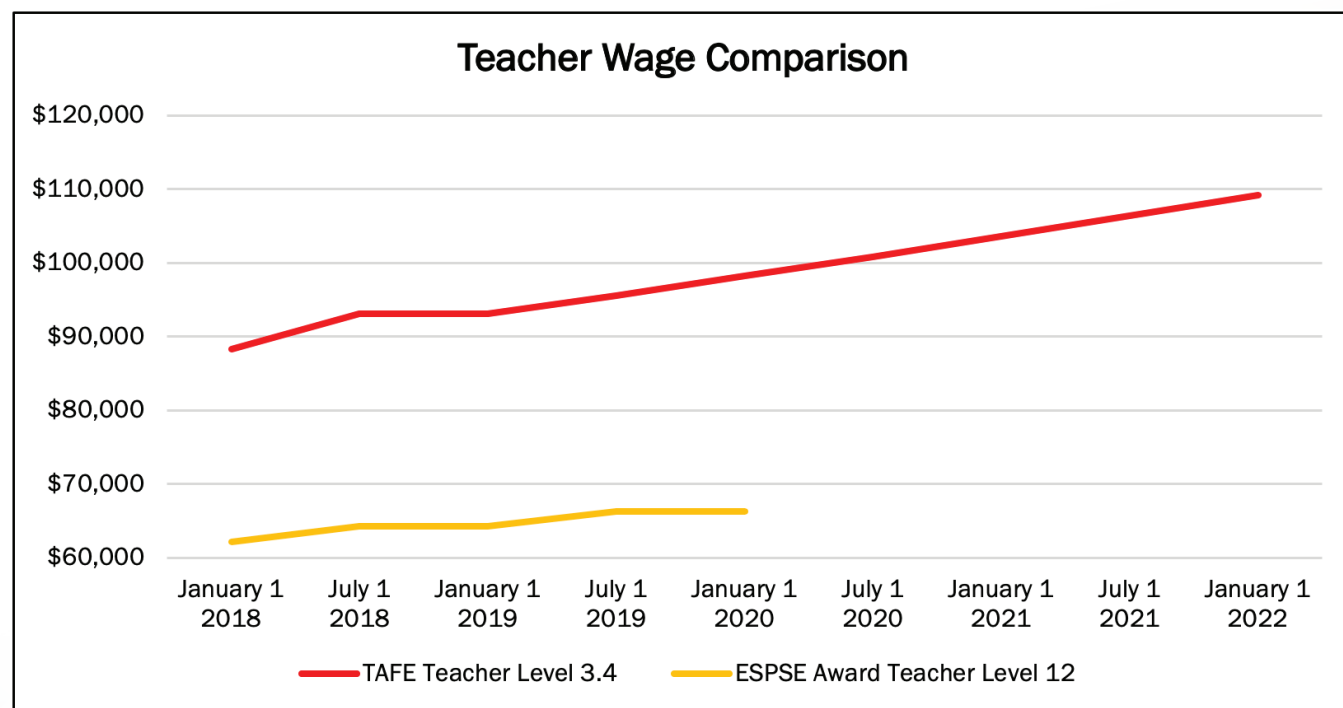
Neighbourhood and Community Houses are another important group of organisations who provide a range of invaluable training course to some of the community's most vulnerable. Many houses provide pre-accredited training as a Learn Local provider, accredited by the Adult and Community Education Board and/or accredited training as a community run, not-for-profit RTO, governed by the VRQA or ASQA.

These Neighbourhood and Community Houses are instrumental in providing training for community members who may be new to Australia or who are economically disadvantaged. Part of the importance of Learn Local providers/community RTOs is they are embedded in the communities they serve. They are often the point at which a new migrant will gain basic English or workplace skills, or women workers gain skills to re-enter the workforce, which will enable them to then go on into a TAFE course.

Learn Local providers/community RTOs are critically important for many vulnerable and marginalised workers, yet they are extremely under-funded, and their teachers and professional staff, who are highly qualified workers, are very poorly paid despite the collective efforts of the workforce.

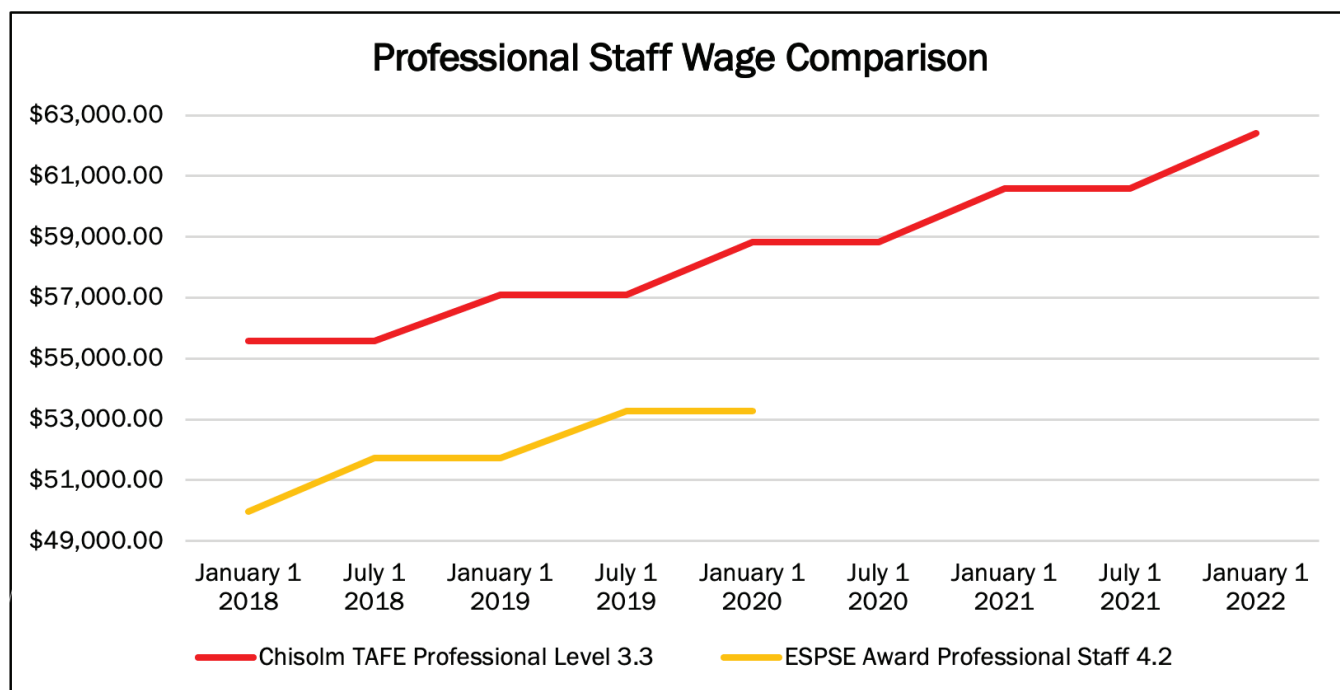
Learn Local/community RTO workers deserve wages and conditions that are comparable to that of TAFE staff.

Below is a graph comparing the wages of a TAFE teacher from the Victorian TAFE Teaching Agreement (2018), and a Learn Local provider/community RTO teacher, covered under the Educational Services (Post-Secondary Education) Award 2010.³⁶



There is a pay gap of approximately \$30,000. This is a huge figure for which there is no justification.

This pay gap is also present on the next graph, comparing the wages of professional staff at Learn Local providers/community RTOs with professional staff at Chisolm TAFE. Again, there is a significant gap, in this instance, of around \$6,000 per annum.



Recommendation 5: Wages paid to Learn Local provider/community RTO teachers, professional support staff and other workers be comparable to TAFE workers.

Learn Local providers/community RTOs should receive additional funding so that they can also employ the kinds of support staff it is recommended TAFEs to employ to provide a high-quality supportive student experience, to meet the same standards recommended in Part 5.

Recommendation 6: Special funding be provided to Learn Local providers/community RTOs to meet expectations around increased wages, and for the employment of professional support staff to ensure a supportive student experience.

4.2 TAFEs and their communities

While a unified funding model is essential, it is also vital that TAFEs retain their identity and ability to serve the needs of their community.

Each TAFE serves the needs of their students and their broader community differently. Some TAFEs are associated with particular industries, and the hard-working staff driving this should not have their work diminished by the establishment of a unified TAFE system.

Recommendation 7: While there is a unified system, each TAFE to remain as its own institution and be encouraged to maintain their identity within their community.

Retaining their identity will likely mean something different to each local TAFE. Certain TAFEs that are associated with the industries relevant to their region should continue to develop these relationships and drive innovation. TAFEs need additional support to work more closely with industry in research and development, particularly in relation to new technologies and be able to train students with the most up-to-date equipment so they complete their courses with the highest level of knowledge and skills possible into the future.

A system of sharing best practice across TAFE institutions is also essential to ensuring these learnings and practices are shared with other TAFEs. This will build on existing cultures of specialisation present in TAFEs such as Bendigo TAFE links to the health sector in the region and Kangan TAFE Centre of Excellence for Automotive programs, while ensuring all students have access to the best possible courses, no matter where they study. For other TAFEs, retaining their identity will mean reinforcing partnerships with local industries and the placement of students with employers with whom they have developed long standing relationships, or be given the opportunity to ensure the placement of students is part of emerging industries.

Recommendation 8: *Encourage the specialisation of TAFE relevant to the needs of local industry within their community.*

Vocational education and training will be central to ensuring working people are part of the prosperity of the future, and as such, it deserves Ministerial oversight.

Recommendation 9: *TAFE Victoria should be responsible to the Department of Education and Training.*

4.3 TAFE Teachers

TAFE teachers are some of the most dedicated workers in the state, often working in complex environments with the double demands of teaching and having industry expertise. The university equivalents of lecturers and subject coordinators often receive much higher salaries.³⁷

The casualisation of the workforce and over-reliance on short term contracts is especially prevalent in post-secondary vocational education institutions. Insecure work makes it impossible for workers to plan their lives. The continuation of casual work and short-term contracts signals an under-valuing of VET workers.

An insecure workforce also has an impact on students, with teachers not being available or having enough time to dedicate to the needs of each student, despite their best efforts. Many teachers work an abundance of unpaid overtime due to their personal commitment to their students.

This simply isn't good enough.

All TAFE workers deserve secure, ongoing work they can rely on.

Recommendation 10: *Make all TAFE jobs ongoing, except where it can genuinely be demonstrated that fixed term or casual work is absolutely necessary.*

5. A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Skills for Growing Victoria's Economy Issues Paper places great emphasis on the low rates of students going on to be employed in their given industry. The Paper raises the question of whether teachers are doing enough to prepare students. The numbers are extremely concerning, however, the focus for addressing these issues should not be directed at hard working TAFE teachers.

While there are a range of factors underlying the issue, it can be summed up very simply: students are not receiving the support they need. There isn't the funding for specialist and support staff to provide this support, and the overall structure of TAFEs mean that often institutions cannot support students with issues that arise in the workplace when on placements or during apprenticeships.

Students have a range of needs and there should be versatile support available. Students who come into vocational training from high school sometimes need additional academic support, particularly with numeracy and literacy. Those who come from the workforce may need assistance with readjusting to education and training. Almost all students need support when it comes to placements, be it finding them, or dealing with any workplace issues that arise.

TAFE teachers are under constant pressure to meet deadlines and deliver classes. They are not resourced enough to deal with what can sometimes be the significant needs of individual students.

This lack of support can make or break a student's VET experience.

The Young Workers Centre has undertaken significant work with apprentices in recent months. In their submission to the Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy Issues Paper, they found that a significant reason behind apprentice dropout rates are issues with the apprentice employer or workplace and feeling like they have nowhere to go. Eventually they feel they have no other choice but to drop out, or they have such a bad experience, they don't want to return to work in that industry.³⁸

Another significant issue for students is initiating courses they do not enjoy because of poor advice or inexperience, and problems navigating a complicated system to redirect their enrolment into the right course.

5.1 Professional Staff

Almost all of these significant issues could be better overcome if the model for government funding properly recognised and valued the expertise of TAFEs and other VET providers professional support staff. These are TAFE workers other than the teachers; including industry technicians, librarians, front of house and admissions staff, social workers, counsellors, placement support officers and language, literacy and numeracy support staff.

The role of these workers must be given priority in reforming the VET system, to ensure a genuinely holistic approach to supporting students through their qualifications if taken.

Recommendation 11: *A holistic approach to vocational education be adopted, so that students and teachers are well supported by professional specialist staff and so TAFEs can form a crucial part of their community's industry and develop expertise in their fields.*

These professional TAFE workers also enable the type of specialisation described above in part 4.2. Along with teachers, workers who are responsible for finding student placements that deliver quality learning experiences in a suitable workplace environment will develop extensive connections within that industry and broader community. Further, technical experts can partner with organisations in industry to drive advancements, which can then be relayed into the classroom.

The VET system has been subjected to many changes over recent decades, leading the market driven system to fail both students and VET workers. Part of this pivot by Government to the market driven system was a unilateral cut to funding for professional staff across all TAFEs. Victorian unions report that as a result of this, the funding that TAFEs receive is not uniformly directed towards professional staff, and in some cases the proportion of this workforce has diminished. No matter which campus a student attends, they deserve the same standard of support.

VTHC respects the efforts made by the Victorian Government to counteract this marketisation, and the restoration of some of the funding to TAFEs. However, funding that is identifiable and recurrent for professional staff that keep TAFEs and other VET institutions running has not been reinstated.

An urgent priority must be rectifying this, and reinstating identifiable and recurrent funding for professional staff. Student's success depends on having access to the support they need, as well as their teachers having the assistance required to have the time to facilitate a high-quality course and learning experience. Professional staff are a crucial part of the TAFE system. Specific funding for this cohort of professional support staff must be identifiable for the sake of students.

Recommendation 12: *Reinstating identifiable (recurrent) funding for wrap around services and professional staff.*

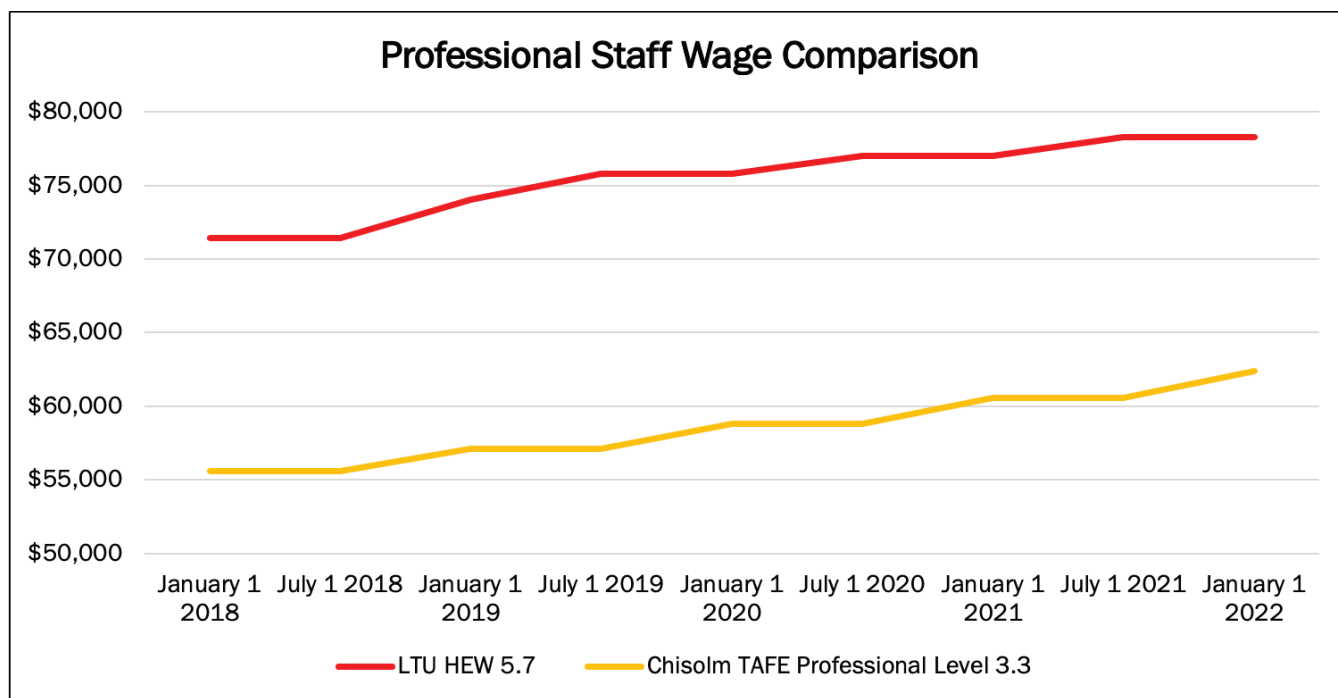
For TAFEs to function well, this cohort of professional staff should make up around 50% of staffing. This is a similar rate to the professional staff working at Australian universities, which are amongst the best in the world. These examples must be applied to TAFE Victoria.

TAFE professional staff are paid significantly less than university professional staff performing the same or similar work. By way of example, the graph on the next page compares the pay rates between Latrobe University higher education workers with professional workers at Chisholm TAFE who perform similar work.

It is clear there is a large and persistent pay gap of around \$20,000. There is no justification for this gap. Particularly considering the workers considered are performing similar work for public education bodies.

This gap speaks to the underfunding for and the unfairly poor reputation of TAFEs, as well as the lack of identifiable and recurrent funding for professional staff. This gap also represents the various levels of quality in the experience of many VET students have in Victoria's TAFEs. This must be rectified immediately.

Recommendation 13: *For the provision of high quality, public TAFE, a system of best practice employment of professional specialist staff at a rate similar to universities.*



6. A TAFE SYSTEM THAT SUPPORTS WORKING PEOPLE INTO THE FUTURE

6.1 Development of Curriculum

Victorian unions report that the current training packages are deficient. Training packages essentially create a shopping list of knowledge and skills that employers want from future workers. Constructing training in this way ignores the proper place for curriculum and does not engender genuine collaboration between industry and TAFE, nor does it set students up with a holistic set of skills and complimentary fundamentals to allow them to engage in a dynamic workforce.

The training packages barely constitute curriculum. These packages established under the Federal system need to be reformed.

The Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy Issues Paper also references the poor reputation of VET qualifications, including that students and their parents often choose university because the perception is this qualification will lead to a better job. Part 2 of this report demonstrates that jobs associated with VET qualifications are secure, well paid jobs, but this information is clearly not filtering through.

This myth should be dispelled, and the reputation of VET restored. This will happen when genuine curriculum is reinstated and when placements are better regulated.

Recommendation 14: *Reintroduce genuine curriculum for VET courses and abandon shopping list style training packages as part of the holistic approach to vocational education.*

Teachers must be given the opportunity to develop a genuine curriculum. They are the only group who have the knowledge to develop a curriculum that teaches skills for the purpose of setting a worker up for life; with well taught fundamentals, and enough critical analysis that will allow them to evolve with industry. Training packages as they currently stand do not deliver this.

Curriculum should be developed in genuine and extensive consultation with industry. While it is important that employers are deeply involved in the process, their wishes should not be the sole focus in driving curriculum development. It must be created by teachers; workers who understand how to teach the students the skills they will need. Employers should be treated as a genuine stakeholder, along with unions and other key stakeholders, who are engaged at every step of the way.

Recommendation 15: *Curriculum to be developed by and be the ultimate responsibility of teachers and educators, in genuine consultation with industry.*

Victorian unions also note that despite their purpose, the reality is that the current training packages teach each individual unit is a standalone mini-course. This means there is significant repetition in some areas - for example, invoicing and marketing is often repeated - whereas other areas don't get the focus they should.

Curriculum units should be developed as genuine clusters. Here, a set of complementary units focussing on a particular skills subset is the focus, allowing a student to deeply develop this skill with finality before moving on to the next one.

Recommendation 16: *Units should build on from previous units or be taught as clusters, instead of the repetition that is part of the current skills packages.*

Research from the Young Workers Centre shows that it is commonplace for young workers to be subjected to wage theft and contraventions of their occupational health and safety conditions. At least 1 in 5 young workers have experienced wage theft³⁹, and 1 in 4 young workers have been asked to perform work that made them feel unsafe.⁴⁰ No worker should experience this. Young workers are particularly vulnerable as they are more likely to be unaware of their rights, or not know which union to contact for assistance.

It is critical that all workers, particularly young workers have the backing of their union when trying to stand up for themselves at work. A range of studies show that unionised workplaces are safer, and unionised workers have higher wages and are more invested in their industry. The OECD Employment Outlook for 2018 reported that there is a strong association between collective bargaining and lower wage inequality, and that wage inequality is highest among workers who are not covered by any form of collective bargaining⁴¹. It is not surprising that wage growth has flatlined within a period in which unions have been under attack at a federal level. In response to these forms of attacks, Victorian unions report that workers who are union members are actually more invested in their workplace, as they are involved in its democratic functioning. A study released in April this year also found that higher union density led to increased rates of productivity.⁴²

Most importantly, increased union membership results in safer workplaces as the presence of health and safety representatives encourages greater reporting and more preventative measures. A study of 31 industrialised countries found that "Union density is the most important external determinant of workplace psychosocial safety climate, health and GDP. It concluded "eroding unionism may not be good for worker health or the economy either."⁴³

Creating safe, secure work that invests in working people long term should be the highest priority of the vocational education and training system. A good relationship with unions and maintaining high rates of unionism is core.

Students should participate in union induction sessions within the first six months of undertaking their course. Students will then be able to draw on the support of their union, if an instance arises where their employer for their placement or apprenticeship is not meeting their obligations. This is also critical to retaining students.

Recommendation 17: *Union inductions to be a mandatory part of the curriculum within the first month of a student beginning their course.*

Further, as part of their VET course, students should undertake and pass a mandatory short unit in workplace rights. It should cover rights around joining a union and taking collective action with their workmates, as well as wages entitlements, their rights regarding their safety at work, and where to go to help should they need it.

Recommendation 18: *Students must also undertake and pass a compulsory unit in workplace rights.*

Unions who represent workers in schools advising students making decisions about their futures note how daunting these decisions can be. Taster courses should be reinstated, to allow students to experience firsthand the kinds of skills they will be exposed to in the industries they are interested in. Students need the opportunity to explore their interests in a practical setting, early.

Taster courses could operate as week-long courses, as part of student's high school experiences, that expose them to some of the skills and work associated with a particular course and its industry. These courses should also be available to workers looking to re-skill or who have been retrenched, so that they can make an informed choice about their work into the future.

They should be free, so they can be widely accessed, allowing students to make informed choices.

Recommendation 19: *Reintroduce fee free taster courses so students have an idea of what they're getting into before committing to a full course.*

The availability of ongoing work into the future; especially in terms of local industry, has a big impact on the types of decisions students make when considering their futures. Students want to make informed choices, providing them with this information would be useful.

Recommendation 20: *Provide detailed information about the viability of a student's industry of interest, and how it will be relevant to their region or community into the future, early so they can make informed choices about training.*

Once TAFEs and RTOs have adopted new curriculums, these courses must be well regulated. The role of the ASQA and VRQA is vital. However, currently, Victorian unions report auditors associated with these bodies do not always have the technical knowledge to assess compliance. Auditors must be highly skilled, with qualifications in both the industry and in teaching.

Recommendation 21: *ASQA and VRQA auditors to have the relevant industry and teaching qualifications.*

6.2 The Role of Employers

Victorian unions support vocational training for students that sets them up to be able to work in their chosen industry, with foundational skills, and with secure jobs, long-term. For this to happen, employers need to communicate what they need from a workforce into the future and for TAFEs to set up genuine working relationships with industry to drive advancements.

At the same time, employers' role in the VET system should be to genuinely invest in their future workers.

This is not always the case. Unions are all too frequently having to deal with employers who are simply making money off training schemes, aren't genuinely interested in the development of young workers, and subject their young workforce to exploitation such as wage theft.

The Young Workers Centre (YWC), based at VTHC, works with young apprentices and has found the rates and forms of exploitation for this group of workers to be gobsmacking. Young apprentices are regularly subjected to wage theft, and their employers 'churn through' apprentices due to their relatively cheap wages. YWC have heard stories of a complete disregard for the workplace safety of apprentices, with one young apprentice being forced to work in the same unsafe conditions that had led to the death of another apprentice not long before.⁴⁴

No employer who subjects their vulnerable workforce to this kind of exploitation should be allowed to take on apprentices, trainees or students on placement.

On the latest figures, 34,465 young workers commenced an apprenticeship over the course of 2019⁴⁵, constituting 6.2% of the total workforce for 15-24 year olds in Victoria⁴⁶. There were 22,390 cancellations and withdrawals of apprentices during the same period. This accounts for 35.8% of total apprentices; a huge number.

While not every apprenticeship cancellation can be attributed to poor employer experience, the exploitation apprentices are subjected to is an enormous issue and is a hugely significant factor in their decision to terminate their qualifications. Analysis from 2014 found that 33.4% of apprentices who dropped out had 'problems with their employment', such as not getting along with their boss or fellow workmates (16.2%), poor working conditions (3.1%), and was unhappy with the on-the-job training (5.4%).⁴⁷ Based on the work of Victorian unions it is clear these problems have become worse over recent years.

This abuse cannot be allowed to continue. There must be a thoughtful intervention to change the behaviour of employers and to end the cycle of abuse for good.

A licensing system, similar to the Labour Hire Licensing regime⁴⁸, that sets minimum standards for employers wishing to take on VET students should be established. These requirements should include complying with minimum standards for wages established in industrial instruments and an untarnished record of occupational health and safety, and supporting worker's rights.

Recommendation 22: *Introduce a licensing system for employers seeking to take on VET students.*

In recognition of the importance of protecting apprentices, trainees and VET students on placement from exploitation, the licensing system should have Ministerial oversight.

Recommendation 23: *The licensing regime to be administered by the Department of Education and Training.*

International research conducted on high functioning vocational training and education models often point to European systems, in particular Switzerland, as it has clearly defined roles for employers in the establishment of curriculum and how it is taught on placements.⁴⁹

Here, VET students spend approximately 60-80% of their time learning on the job, and the delivery of curriculum in the workplace is highly specified and enforced by contract. Swiss employers are deeply involved in the design and adaptation of curriculum as a stakeholder.⁵⁰ Students do almost everything an entry level worker would do, in a huge range of industries. Around 70% of the young worker labour force learn through the Swiss VET system, and it's responsible for occupations associated with IT, teaching and most engineering roles. Universities are reserved for highly academic pursuits. On the job learning is so normalised that employers refer to students as 'educational employees.'

There is great potential in applying this model to Victoria through a licensing regime.

Learning on the job should be the core part of the curriculum, with employers responsible for enabling students to practice and develop core skills. Almost every course currently has some form of placement as part of it, and this should expand.

However, Victorian unions are wary that giving employers that much responsibility could lead to very bad outcomes for students. The introduction of a licensing scheme would regulate this problem.

The licensing regime could also match up to industry policy and the Government's social procurement strategy. For example, licensed organisations should demonstrate they comply with environmental standards. For large employers, Gender Equality Action Plans should form part of the application for licensing. All employers should be able to demonstrate they do not engage labour hire, and can justify the employment of casual workers as absolutely necessary.

Recommendation 24: *Licensing requirements form part of Victoria's industry policy.*

Once employers are licensed, they must then enter into a training contract with the student, VET provider, and if the student requests, their relevant union. This will enable a shift away from the current power imbalance where employers have an unfair advantage over students on placements.

The current contracts do not specify which skills employers are responsible for training their student in, nor do they specify the method or type of work students will undertake to meet their training requirements, nor do they contain any other social obligations. This is all vital information that should form part of an employer's commitment to a VET student.

Unions should be party to these agreements, if the apprentice requests it, as they should have the power to inspect workplaces and assist young workers where necessary.

Recommendation 25: *Once licensed, employers sign on to an agreement with the VET provider and student. The student should also have the option to request their union be a party to the agreement, should they wish. The agreement should include the exact obligations on the employer, including the skills of the student they are responsible for developing, and should specify that unions have powers of inspection and are available to assist young workers.*

These placements should be sought by professional support staff, who then should be responsible for collating all ongoing contracts. Along with teachers, these workers should be responsible for finding quality placements for students, and for being a point of support for students as they carry out their work.

Recommendation 26: *Professional staff to be responsible for collating a list of licensed employers within their community, auditing these employers, and maintaining the blacklist.*

If an employer derogates from their obligations as specified in the contract, there must be consequences. These may be in the form of fines and a blacklist, so that no other vulnerable young worker has to be subjected to any form of exploitation.

Recommendation 27: *Introduce consequences such as blacklisting or fines for breaking the agreement or licensing requirements.*

6.3 Student Wages

Another core part of well-regarded international VET systems across Europe is the payment of real living wages for students. This feature is also common amongst other high functioning economies, with well-regarded vocational education systems.

In these countries, it is recognised that investing in students is a long-term commitment and will drive the continued success of the industries they work in. It is not viewed as the student's individual responsibility to become trained, as is often the perspective in Australia. Paying students a wage while they study is part of this recognition.

Paying students a wage to study will also become extremely important as Victoria recovers from COVID-19. Victorian unions hope that unemployment figures do not rise to the rates that are projected, and are doing everything they can to fight for every last job. However, if these numbers do play out, the Victorian Government should see it as an opportunity to create a genuinely level playing field for workers. Paying workers who use this time to retrain a living wage is not only the just thing to do, it is smart economics, as working people are more likely to spend what they earn and drive demand.

The Victorian Government's 'Free TAFE' policy is worthy of commendation, as it demonstrates an understanding of the barriers working people face, while also developing a workforce that is ready for the demands of industry into the future. Free TAFE should be expanded into all TAFE courses, and students should be supported while they study.

Recommendation 28: *Make all post-secondary education free and pay all students who are not enrolled in secondary school, a living wage while they study.*

If VET students are undertaking work, then they should be entitled to the full amount of their minimum entitlements.

There is no justification for apprentice or trainee wages, or for junior wages more generally.

In reality, continuous training occurs daily in most workplaces as standard practice. In these instances, it would be ridiculous to pay a worker less while they learn a new skill. Unions would fight tooth and nail against any employer who suggests a worker be paid, for example, 70% of their wage during a mandatory training workshop. If a worker is conducting work for their employer, they should simply be entitled to the same wage as any other worker, and this principle should apply to apprentices and trainees.

The COVID-19 crisis has truly exposed this problem within the Victoria workforce. In normal times, young workers often choose apprenticeships because they want to earn while they develop their skills in their chosen field. Many young workers rely on these wages to put food on the table and to pay their rent. Affiliates have told us that during this crisis, apprentices have been the first to be let go, or alternatively apprentices have no other option but to apply for JobSeeker, because their wages aren't enough when times are difficult.

The Young Workers Centre submission to the Issues Paper also details how the COVID-19 crisis has been a catalyst for exploitation of apprentices. Many apprentices have detailed how the pandemic has been used as a guise to terminate their employment as they near the end of their qualifications.

Post COVID-19 Victoria will also likely see an increase in the number of workers seeking retraining through the VET system. On current figures, the unemployment rate is 6.9% in Victoria, and the youth unemployment rate is 16.1% across Australia.⁵¹ There are predictions unemployment could rise substantially throughout the rest of 2020, with the peak expected in September 2020.

Recommendation 29: *Increase apprenticeship wages to be living wages, and remove distinction between apprentices and other workers with the same skills as per relevant industrial instruments.*

6.4 Study/Training Leave

The Paper references that the needs of industry will evolve continuously, and to keep up workers will need to undertake an additional 3,000 hours of training over the course of their working lives. As explained above, if this were the case, workers will need to undertake on average 3 hours of additional training per week.

Study or training leave should become a standardised provision under employment law. If the rates of training will increase as these numbers suggest, ensuring every worker has the opportunity to access training will become a fundamental

question of fairness. As such, study or training leave should become part of the National Employment Standards, so that every worker may have the opportunity to grow with their industry.

Ensuring all workers can access study/training leave equally, will be instrumental in ensuring no worker is left behind as issues like automation and specialisation take hold. It is not difficult to see a situation where the responsibility of re-training is outsourced to the individual worker, and those with caring responsibilities like women, or those who cannot afford it, being left behind. This will likely result in a deepening of the wealth divide.

The equal provision of study/training leave demonstrates a commitment to the skills of the future and to addressing inequality. It should be extended to ongoing training and ongoing professional development for working people.

Recommendation 30: *Study/training Leave to become part of the National Employment Standards. Victorian Government to advocate for this to Federal Government.*

6.5 Professional Development for Working People

Micro-credentialing has become one of the central questions of how vocational education will operate into the future. Victorian unions have raised various views on the merits of micro-credentials across the industries they cover. When considering micro-credentials the number one priority should be the impact that they will have on workers, including how they will shape their skills and opportunities into the future.

Instead, the types of micro-credentials taken up are often only beneficial to employers. Employers are compelling their workforce to undertake single units of study that are part of a broader course but disregard the rest of their units towards this qualification. Some employers are forcing their workers to launch straight into the immediate needs of the project, without developing the long-term skills and competencies to fulfil roles across the entire sector.

Affiliated unions, particularly in the building and construction industry, are concerned this will lead to a system that incentivises students to only undertake single units, dependent only on the relationship with their current or future employer and their needs. Unions are concerned this will lead to workers being locked into jobs with a reduced skillset, become dependent on their employer and workplace, and who will then be at a greater risk as technology, industry, practices or the economy moves on.

Alternatively, there is deep support amongst Victorian unions for the idea of genuine professional development and skills enhancement including qualifications that are an entry to meaningful work with transferable skills and that do not degrade the opportunity for workers to engage in industry. The Working for Victoria short-courses, are a good example of the types of credentials that should be supported into the future; where they provide genuine skills development quickly, and can be built upon or contribute to meaningful work.

A system of professional development for working people, building upon already held Certificates III or IV, or Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas, and contributing towards a further qualification would generate positive outcomes for Victorian workers. A professional development system must also be accredited and well-regulated.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) has highlighted that there is a vocational course in renal dialysis, available to students who have a Diploma of Nursing. Also, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) Victoria is trialing pilot programs for union members to gain skills in regulatory environments, policy and a range of other areas. The courses will be accredited, and will provide their membership the opportunity to have genuine training relevant to their area of work.

These are examples of authentic upskilling, where the fundamentals are present. These qualifications enable workers genuine entry to their industries, workers can still return to other work, and importantly they are not qualified to merely perform only one task or small set of tasks. This model could work for many different trades. The CFMMEU has recommended that for those who have a Certificate III in Bricklaying, professional development courses may include refractory work as an extra unit of study.

Recommendation 31: *Ensure micro-credential courses in Victorian TAFEs are accredited and part of genuine professional development for working people.*

Importantly, a professional development system for workers with vocational qualifications must be licenced and regulated. It must build towards students having a cluster of skills and escalate the development of these skills. Units here could fit into a genuine curriculum, as either building the foundations for a further qualification, or jumping off a qualification into

something that is more specialised.

These units of professional development must be teachable, deliverable and assessable. Where they include practical on the job skills learning, employers must be able to demonstrate that students are having the opportunity to do so, and must be accountable to regulators.

Recommendation 32: Professional development units should either build towards, or upon a genuine qualification.

Recommendation 33: Monitor and audit professional development courses and single units of study to ensure they are not being abused by employers.

Streams of professional development for working people must constitute training, so that workers can have access to study/training leave to be part of the National Employment Standards (as at 6.4)

Recommendation 34: Ensure appropriate workplace support for professional development and training.

7. SOLVING UNEMPLOYMENT IN VICTORIA

COVID-19 has been an incredibly difficult time for working people, who have stepped up in an enormous way. From health care workers and nurses, to delivery riders, retail and supermarket workers, teachers, early childhood educators and cleaners – working people have continued to put themselves on the line and work tirelessly for ongoing health and safety of Victorians.

However, working people are bearing the brunt of unemployment through the COVID-19 downturn. The crisis has led to a stark increase in joblessness across Victoria; 6.9% of workers are currently unemployed, higher than during the peak of the Global Financial Crisis.⁵² Unemployment is affecting young people even more harshly with 16.1% of 15-24 year olds out of work.⁵³

Below is the Victorian Labour Force Data for May 2020.

	Victoria %	Men %	Women %
Unemployed	6.9	7.2	6.7
Participation rate	63.7	69.3	58.3
Full-time work	65	76.9	52
Part-time work	25.6	17	41.9
Underemployed	16.3	15.2	17.5
Underutilised	22.1	21.3	23

Victorian unions also report that unemployment is particularly affecting migrant workers. While it is more difficult to quantify, people with work visas have been denied access to social security in the form of JobSeeker or JobKeeper, and have been denied other fundamentals such as Medicare. There has been a significant increase in the number of migrant workers accessing food banks during recent weeks. The number of overall people seeking relief from food charities has increased to 1.4 million people⁵⁴, indicating the level of hardship currently facing many working people.

This health crisis has also highlighted the ongoing problems within the labour force that were present before COVID-19. The mass amounts of insecure and gig work, as well as sham contracting, has meant that many workers have been unable to access JobKeeper. For example, the arts industry is one where workers are predominantly deemed sole traders. The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) the union representing this industry has reported that very few workers in this sector have been able to access JobKeeper.

The unemployment crisis is projected to peak around September, with analysts expecting a peak of 8% in September.⁵⁵ This coincides with the Commonwealth's expiration for JobSeeker and JobKeeper. If this results, unemployed workers will face state-created poverty.

Below are the impacts of COVID-19 on the five largest employing industries, within the first few weeks of restrictions, before JobKeeper and JobSeeker came into effect.⁵⁶ This is demonstrative of what the labour force may look like after these measures expire.

	Health Care & Social Assistance (%)	Retail Trade (%)	Professional, scientific & technical services (%)	Construction (%)	Accommodation & food services (%)
Businesses that made changes to their workforce	63	47	36	52	78
Temporarily reduced staff hours	44	37	20	23	70
Changes staff location (eg work from home)	42	18	25	20	N/A
Placed staff on leave	17 (unpaid leave)	13 (unpaid leave)	20 (paid leave)	13 (paid leave)	43 (unpaid leave)

As Victoria and Australia looks towards work post COVID-19 restrictions, particular emphasis must be placed on the creation of secure, full-time and ongoing work.

The downturn in unemployment is clear, and private industry cannot be relied upon to lead the recovery. The state must play a critical role in the creation and development of skilled jobs for working people, particularly in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, as well as into the future.

The Victorian Government cannot sit back. It must substantially increase its involvement to drive job creation by state involvement in industry, expanding industry policy and creating a Jobs and Training Guarantee (see 8.2).

It is imperative that no Victorian worker is left behind. Every Victorian worker should be able to access training via training credits to learn fundamental skills. This should be implemented through Free TAFE programs to help unemployed workers find a job. The State Government should connect workers who are undergoing training through TAFE with available jobs through an earning or learning scheme.

Recommendation 35: A commitment from the Victorian Government that any worker who suffers job loss or a reduction in hours or income have the opportunity to be re-skilled in a growth industry and that no worker will lose out due to the effects of COVID-19.

8. INDUSTRY POLICY

VET should become one of the main levers the Government pulls in the execution of its industry policy. Now more than ever, there is an opportunity to kickstart Victoria's economy through manufacturing and healthcare, while also ensuring it can be done sustainably. TAFEs should be driving this innovation and be partnering with their local communities and workforces to make this happen.

Industry policy should be developed to go hand in hand with skills and training policy. As outlined above, a licensing mechanism could be one mechanism for allowing the Government to extend industry policy and strategy and shape the workforce.

Recommendation 36: Victorian industry and skills policy to be developed simultaneously and to be complimentary.

Where TAFEs have specific expertise, they should be given the opportunity to lead the development of high quality teaching, learning and industry practices, which can be adopted across other TAFEs. This could drive innovation while ensuring state-wide consistency.

This policy could also be used to develop and deploy across the TAFE system excellence in the field of sustainability, focussing on technologies and practices that may address climate change, as well as instituting sustainable processes into other fields that may respond to climate change, such as health care or hospitality.

Recommendation 37: *Encourage particular TAFEs become industry leaders, focussing on proficiency for certain occupations or industries, and share this knowledge across TAFEs.*

8.1 Planning for Automation

Another issue that warrants urgent consideration by the Government is automation of work; which has well and truly already taken a foothold in the Victorian economy. While Victorian unions do not want to stand in the way of progress, there is a deep concern that without immediate intervention there will be mass job losses, with no way for workers to put food on the table. It is working people's jobs that will be automated. Without an ongoing commitment to working people, automation will be the catalyst for entrenched poverty into the future.

Industry policy must plan for this. Part of this should be mandating that where businesses are receiving government support due to industry downturn, a significant proportion of this should be given to the workforce to re-train.

Recommendation 38: *Government should make funds specifically available for re-skilling due to automation, and a portion of grants to business or industry in transition must go to workers to re-skill.*

The Government should make a commitment that where any worker loses work - either their employment or a significant reduction in hours - they will be either re-skilled or re-deployed by the Victorian Government.

8.2 A Jobs and Training Guarantee

While the training and development of workers' skills is crucial, so too is the creation of the requisite jobs for them to work in and be trained for. The driving of job creation goes hand in hand with training for a number of reasons, but is particularly pertinent to recommendations regarding on the job training.

As established above (see 7), the state must play a critical role in job creation, particularly now given the high rates of unemployment and underemployment in the context of COVID-19.

This role should not only include investing in businesses that will drive the advancements, technologies and practices Victoria will need, but having state-owned and operated corporations present in industry, shaping standards and outcomes. Most importantly, any investment driven by the Government in industry must go hand in hand with an agreement with TAFE to be at the core of training the workforce and driving skills advancements for the needs of the industry into the future.

The government should operate in sectors such as clean energy, infrastructure building, and the delivery of community services, amongst many others. Following this, there must be planned cooperation with TAFEs so that workers can share in these developments.

As part of the VTHC Just Transitions framework, a rapid expansion of local sustainable manufacturing in Victoria's regions is supported. The Victorian Government could drive this by investing in local businesses developing these technologies, or starting its own agency to do the work. Part of this investment must be in the form of a minimum requirement for apprentices and trainees. Following this, a proportionate investment related to the investment in industry should go to the local TAFE, who would be responsible for training the workers to meet the needs of this industry, but also develop best practice for sustainable manufacturing.

This kind of planning by government and central involvement of TAFEs in industry will be critical to driving the kind of economic prosperity that all working Victorians should be able to share in.

Recommendation 39: *The Victorian Government implement industry policy that is bound to training policy, in the form of a Jobs and Training Guarantee. Here, any investment in industry must be matched by a proportionate investment in TAFE to coordinate the required skills and training needs.*

With this form of commitment to driving job creation, the Victorian Government can build upon its involvement in industry and investigate rolling out a Jobs Guarantee. Every worker who is able to and wants to work should have the option of a good, meaningful job, that contributes to the high quality of life that Victorians deserve.

Recommendation 40: *The Victorian Government significantly ramp-up its involvement in industry through Government owned corporations, that could be used to provide a Jobs and Training Guarantee.*

Under a Jobs and Training Guarantee, opportunities to address other issues through coordinated workforce training will arise. This framework can be used to undertake the Victorian Government's commitment to addressing climate change while ensuring there are well paid and secure jobs for working people.

Coordinating a Jobs and Training Guarantee would require the Government plan growth industries, with a prioritisation on those that are sustainable.

The Victorian Government could further invest in sustainable energy, such as wind, solar, and hydro. It could invest in sustainable manufacturing; encouraging the creation of goods that have no environmental impact or to respond to the needs of the changing environment. It could also invest in practices and occupations that respond to a changing environment, from conservationists and landcare to emergency service personnel and healthcare providers.

A well-coordinated Jobs and Training Guarantee would also align with VET policy, with TAFEs playing a major role in developing technologies and skills to meet the demands of a guaranteed workforce.

Recommendation 41: *Industry policy be developed in line with a Just Transition, and encourage training opportunities to equip vulnerable communities to train in skills to meet the challenges of climate change.*

8.3 Licensing of Trades

The Victorian Government's action on the registration and licensing of building trades is supported by Victorian unions, but this approach should be extended to all trades across Victoria.

The options paper for registering and licensing tradespeople who perform carpentry work sets out that a lack of licensing has resulted in non-compliant work, lack of accountability to consumers and the broader regulatory system, and a diminished skills foundation.⁵⁷ These issues are not just present in carpentry but across all trades.

Victorian unions report often that employers over-rely on the use of casual workers or independent contractors where they should be employing and upskilling a workforce. This results in a gap of skills development and poor work. It also results in many workers having no choice but to operate as independent contractors; undercutting their own wages to compete to get work.

While this kind of behaviour is particularly prevalent in the building industry, it is common across all trades. There is no mandatory licensing for employers and workers deeming to offer a trade. This lack of regulatory oversight must surely damage the reputation of trades workers, and the value of a trade qualification.

Licensing trades will not only result in a better standard of trade work and increased rights to workers, it will also increase the reputation of trades as a post-secondary education option. It would also go some way to address the increasing use of micro-credentials, leaving workers without the foundational skills and knowledge to work competently in their industry.

Recommendation 42: *The Government expand its current licensing regime to license all trades operating in Victoria.*

Importantly, accountability and consistency should be two of the key goals in licensing trades. An extension of this should be the issuing of standardised trades certificates.

Every TAFE and university across Victoria issues their own version of trade papers, making it unnecessarily complicated in trying to understand which qualification is represented by the certificate. Trade papers should be standardised and follow a prescribed form set by the Victorian Government.

Recommendation 43: *Issue Standardised Trade Papers.*

9. THE ROLE OF UNIONS

The role of unions in the vocational education and training sector cannot be overstated. Unions exist to ensure workers are part of safe and secure workplaces, which is of critical importance to workers who are undergoing training.

Victorian unions have also always stood for the advancement of working people, and part their role as to also foster genuine opportunity for workers. For this reason, VTHC and its affiliates continue to fight for the highest quality public TAFE system to ensure equal access to the advancement associated with VET qualifications.

Some unions also operate as registered training organisations (RTOs) and deliver high quality and specific training. The CFMEU Construction Division training unit delivers dozens of high-risk work qualifications as well as training in OHS and for union delegates. The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) Centre for U offers a range of training opportunities, specifically for unemployed members and training in priority areas to become highly skilled to help overcome unemployment as well as training in first aid, OHS and family support and counselling services. The Australian Nurses and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) Victorian Branch has a training centre that offers a range of courses including nationally recognised qualifications and professional development. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) State Public Services Federation (SPSF) Victoria Branch is piloting a number of programs available to union members to gain skills in regulatory environments, policy and a range of other areas.

9.1 Pilot Projects for Overcoming Disadvantage

VTHC is also piloting two projects to assist marginalised workers gain access to TAFE qualifications. Firstly, the Job Readiness Pre-Apprenticeship Project aims to pilot a short preparatory program to build the job readiness of participants and match them to employers willing to take on apprentices and/or trainees. These are for vulnerable migrant workers or asylum seekers and provide mentorships and support as they navigate the complex fields of vocational education.

The Women's Work Project aims to improve the participation of women in apprentices and traineeships in male dominated trades, by identifying and removing barriers to women's participation. Regional disadvantage and growth industries are being taken into consideration as the project rolls out, so as to give maximum benefit to regions and to participants.

Participants in these projects have already garnered a degree of success. Workers who come from disadvantaged or marginalised communities require an additional degree of support dealing with the complexities of the system.

This kind of pilot should be expanded and rolled out throughout the TAFE system. Disadvantaged students should be provided the extensive support they need within TAFEs, as well as a union-based mentor as they undertake their training. Targeted support should be provided to migrant, refugee and asylum seeker students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, women returning to the workforce or women undertaking trades in male dominated fields, and students with a disability. VTHC should continue to coordinate this project in connection with TAFE Victoria.

Recommendation 44: *Roll out the Job Readiness Pilot to all Disadvantaged Students, coordinated by VTHC.*

10. CONCLUSION

Vocational education and training is the domain of working people. Jobs associated with VET qualifications are secure, and provide good wages for working people. However, over recent years, the VET system has been subjected to a number of alterations creating a market driven system that has led to Victorian TAFEs being chronically underfunded and fails working Victorians. While there have been some attempts in recent years to wind this back, unfortunately the key elements of market driven system remain at the centre of VET policy.

This must end as a matter of urgency.

It is vital that a unified TAFE system in Victoria to be established, to provide high quality education and training, developed by Victoria's world class public education teachers and receive the large majority of VET funding. Reforms should create a holistic system that values the workers who provide support to these institutions, and for TAFEs to be further embedded within their communities and help drive advancements in their industries. Where TAFE is not the recipient of funding, RTOs and Learn Local providers/community RTOs that can demonstrate the same commitment to high quality training for working people that drives advancement and equality for working people should be eligible to receive the remaining funding.

Employers should be a key part of this system, providing advice often as stakeholders, and offering genuine placements, traineeships and apprenticeships with good conditions. Licensing of these placements would address the low completion rates, while also providing an opportunity to drive industry policy, placing TAFEs at the centre. The Government must further coordinate industry policy, ramping up its industry planning and job creation to ensure the opportunities for working people exist.

The Victorian union movement recommends the Government to see the post COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity for reset. It is a time for reforming conditions of work that are precarious, and result in working people being stuck with no way to be a part of the state's economic prosperity. Vocational education and training has the potential to drive significant change, and to align with a number of the Government's aims for social policy.

VTHC has always been dedicated to ensuring that working Victorians can build their skills and access opportunities to create equality across the workforce. From the Working Men's College to now, vocational education and training has always been the domain of workers and the mechanism that has catapulted Victoria into the future, while ensuring no one is left behind. It is time that this attitude be reclaimed, and that vocational education and training become the world class system that Victorian workers deserve.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendation 1:** *Establish a public, unified TAFE system.*
- Recommendation 2:** *TAFEs receive at least 70% of vocational education and training funding.*
- Recommendation 3:** *The remaining 30% of funding to be contestable, by TAFEs, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) who meet a set of guidelines, and Learn Local providers/community RTOs.*
- Recommendation 4:** *To be entitled to receive public funding, RTOs must meet strict guidelines that ensure the training in these institutions be at the same quality level expected from public institutions, that should include:*
- a. A holistic approach to vocational education, including a high rate of professional specialist staff,*
 - b. Delivery of genuine curriculum for each course,*
 - c. Union inductions and workplace rights training within the course,*
 - d. A demonstrated commitment to their workforce, including the encouragement of union membership and ongoing, secure work, and*
 - e. Placements and apprenticeships with the same contractual standards as TAFEs.*
- Recommendation 5:** *Wages paid to Learn Local provider/community RTO teachers, professional support staff and other workers be comparable to TAFE teachers.*
- Recommendation 6:** *Special funding be provided to Learn Local providers/community RTOs to meet expectations around increased wages, and for the employment of professional support staff to ensure a supportive student experience.*
- Recommendation 7:** *While there is a unified system, each TAFE to remain as its own institution and be encouraged to maintain their identity within their community.*
- Recommendation 8:** *Encourage the specialisation of TAFE relevant to the needs of local industry within their community.*
- Recommendation 9:** *TAFE Victoria should be responsible to the Department of Education and Training.*
- Recommendation 10:** *Make all TAFE jobs ongoing and full-time, except where it can genuinely be demonstrated that casual work is necessary.*
- Recommendation 11:** *A holistic approach to vocational education be adopted, so that students and teachers are well supported by professional specialist staff and so TAFEs can form a crucial part of their community's industry and develop expertise in their fields.*
- Recommendation 12:** *Reinstating identifiable (recurrent) funding for wrap around services and professional staff.*
- Recommendation 13:** *For the provision of high quality, public TAFE, a system of best practice employment of professional specialist staff at a rate similar to universities.*
- Recommendation 14:** *Reintroduce genuine curriculum for VET courses and abandon shopping list style skills packages as part of the holistic approach to vocational education.*
- Recommendation 15:** *Curriculum to be developed by and be the ultimate responsibility of teachers and educators, in genuine consultation with industry.*
- Recommendation 16:** *Units should build on from previous units or be taught as clusters, instead of the repetition that is part of the current skills packages.*

- Recommendation 17:** *Union inductions to be a mandatory part of the curriculum within the first month of a student beginning their course.*
- Recommendation 18:** *Students must also undertake and pass a compulsory unit in workplace rights.*
- Recommendation 19:** *Reintroduce fee free taster courses so students have an idea of what they're getting into before committing to a full course.*
- Recommendation 20:** *Provide detailed information about the viability of a student's industry of interest, and how it will be relevant to their region or community into the future, early so they can make informed choices about training.*
- Recommendation 21:** *ASQA and VRQA auditors to have the relevant qualifications.*
- Recommendation 22:** *Introduce a licensing system for employers seeking to take on VET students.*
- Recommendation 23:** *The licensing regime to be administered by the Department of Education and Training.*
- Recommendation 24:** *Licensing requirements form part of Victoria's industry policy.*
- Recommendation 25:** *Once licensed, employers sign on to an agreement with the VET provider and student. The student should also have the option to request their union be a party to the agreement, should they wish. The agreement should include the exact obligations on the employer, including the skills of the student they are responsible for developing, and should specify that unions have powers of inspection and are available to assist young workers.*
- Recommendation 26:** *Professional staff to be responsible for collating a list of licensed employers within their community, auditing these employers, and maintaining the blacklist.*
- Recommendation 27:** *Introduce consequences such as blacklisting or fines for breaking the agreement or licensing requirements.*
- Recommendation 28:** *Make all post secondary education free and pay all students, older than school age, a living wage while they study.*
- Recommendation 29:** *Increase apprenticeship wages to be living wages, and remove distinction between apprentices and other workers with the same skills as per relevant industrial instruments.*
- Recommendation 30:** *Study/training Leave to become part of the National Employment Standards.*
- Recommendation 31:** *Ensure micro-credential courses in Victorian TAFEs are part of genuine professional development for working people.*
- Recommendation 32:** *Professional development units should either build towards, or upon a genuine qualification.*
- Recommendation 33:** *Monitor and audit professional development courses and single units of study to ensure they are not being abused by employers.*
- Recommendation 34:** *Ensure appropriate workplace support for professional development and training.*
- Recommendation 35:** *A commitment from the Victorian Government that any worker who suffers job loss or a reduction in hours or income have the opportunity to be re-skilled in a growth industry and that no worker will lose out due to the effects of COVID-19.*
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- Recommendation 40:** *The Victorian Government significantly ramp-up its involvement in industry through Government owned corporations, that could be used to provide a Jobs and Training Guarantee.*
- Recommendation 41:** *Industry policy be developed in line with a Just Transition, and encourage training opportunities to equip vulnerable communities to train in skills to meet the challenges of climate change.*
- Recommendation 42:** *The Government expand its current licensing regime to license all trades operating in Victoria.*
- Recommendation 43:** *Issue Standardised Trade Papers.*
- Recommendation 44:** *Roll out the Job Readiness Pilot to all Disadvantaged Students, coordinated by VTHC.*

12. ENDNOTES

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