

Submission from Beacon Foundation

Introduction

This submission shares Beacon Foundation's experience of connecting with regional, rural and remote areas. Beacon Foundation has been operating for 30 years – starting with one program, in one school in regional Tasmania in 1988. In this time, we have seen a dramatically changing job market. Our experience shows that employers are after things like:

- STEM skills
- Transferrable 21st century skills such as collaboration, creativity and problem solving
- So called 'soft skills' like communication and interpersonal skills

Connecting employers with students in school helps to build more readiness in young people for the expectations and realities of the workforce – but also building aspiration and confidence to achieve these goals.

Beacon Foundation advocates strongly for career awareness. Starting that conversation helps young people to engage on their life pathway earlier – rather than later. By raising awareness of the various career possibilities and/or awareness of the skills and capabilities necessary to access the workforce we generate aspiration and knowledge of the pathways needed to get there.

To build career awareness, we need to facilitated greater engagement in education and aspiration. In our experience, part of the work in lifting educational attainment and engagement can be achieved by facilitating positive connections between business, industry and schools. This supports young people to develop relevant skills that will set them up for the changing world of work. It also makes sure that young people have awareness of the range of pathways available to them after compulsory education – be it TAFE, vocational education, tertiary education or employment.

This submission shares opportunities and solutions that would build aspiration, educational attainment and connection for young people in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia. There is a role for not for profit organisations like Beacon Foundation to drive education, raise achievement and improve opportunities for school learning

The Advisory Panel is welcome to connect with Beacon Foundation at any stage to understand the value of bringing business and industry into schools in these communities.

Challenge A: There are fewer study options available in RRR areas

Beacon Foundation agrees that growing participation of students in rural, regional and remote areas in post-secondary education is critical. We advocate for higher levels of educational attainment and engagement, because of the evidence that long term life outcomes will be better for the young person – life time levels of employment, life milestones like starting a family, buying a home.ⁱ

To help more young people achieve meaningful pathways in life we need to focus on:

- Building aspiration in young people
- Engaging young people with opportunities to access higher education
- Supporting young people to access meaningful pathways
- Careers advice and awareness

The recent Gonski report noted that creating more study opportunities and engagement in education is critical to reducing inequity. It affirmed that school and industry collaborations improve opportunities for education and employment outcomes. Gonski also noted that while some partnerships between schools and industry appeared to be taking place, they are still “not common practice and implementation can be ad hoc”.ⁱⁱ Not all students and schools are able to fully benefit from meaningful and ongoing engagement with industry.

As a key facilitator of such partnership arrangements, we have found that these arrangements can be dependent on intermediary organisations (like ourselves) to build connections. They are also reliant on key people in the school and community to drive the partnership – rather than long term strategic direction. Driving long term collaboration is key.

To avoid limiting opportunities for engagement, we recommend a focus on using technology opportunities and advancements to encourage collaboration. Online mentoring, for example, allows us to break down geographic and socio-economic barriers by reaching schools everywhere and connecting them to volunteer mentors who work in all kinds of jobs all over Australia. Exploring more options for online mentoring and career awareness would expand opportunities for collaboration between service providers, schools and industry. Ultimately with an aim to connect young people to pathways to higher education or employment options.

Challenge C: Raising aspirations for tertiary education

One of the key barriers for young people is lack of information about career and study opportunities- and the pathways a young person might need to take to achieve their goals and aspirations. Raising career awareness and aspiration is pivotal to educational attainment; offering opportunities to learn and engage online can really break down barriers. We believe a real opportunity is online mentoring. This is something that was trialled successfully in Canadian remote and regional areas where young people were connected to business and industry mentors – all with an overall aim of:

- Increasing school participation
- Increasing retention in school
- Creating career pathways

In this case study, a balance between navigating education and employment options, and personal career insights was unique to the mentoring program. Ultimately it significantly helped raise aspirations in young people. ⁱⁱⁱ

It is critical that programs be designed that have the capability to reach regional and remote schools and utilise live industry mentors as an integral program component. If we can address technological challenges and accessibility, technology has a power of being a great leveller. Using technology to raise engagement and aspiration has proven successful in piloting our own online mentoring programs, *MyRoad* and *Industry Live*.

Challenge F: Implementing and monitoring a national strategy

Beacon Foundation sees value in establishing a National Regional Education Commissioner to oversee the Strategy. Goals and targets need to be both aspirational and measurement based – such as Year 12 attainment rates, participation in higher educational and vocational education.

However, it is important that we do not lose sight of the value of working in place based, community driven approaches. Any national strategy should be complemented by collective impact approaches in a local community. Often business, schools and community groups are willing and able to work effectively to overcome challenges that can be location and region specific. This approach can work to address overall aims and aspirations in a way that has the community and the young people based there at the heart and centre – rather than a one size fits all system. Government programs that are flexible to local communities and where communities drive local, place based solutions, can be more successful. ^{iv}

References

ⁱ FYA (2015) Report card 2015: How young people are faring in the transition from school to work. FYA. Melbourne.

ⁱⁱ D. Gonski (2018), Through Growth to Achievement Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools. Australian Government: Canberra

ⁱⁱⁱ Wallis, J, Riddell, J, Smith, C, Silvertown, J & Pepler, D, (2015), Investing Patterns of Participation and Conversation Content in an Online Mentoring Program for Northern Canadian Youth, Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, v23 n3, pp228-247.

^{iv} OECD (2016), Job Creation and Local Economic Development 2016, OECD Publishing, Paris