



GEELONG REGION CAREER & SKILLS STORE (CASS)

VALIDATION REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY JUNE 2007



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City of Greater Geelong



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Geelong Region Vocational Education Council



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Executive Summary

This report examines the viability of a 'one stop shop' for career and skills support and advice for individuals, industry and Government in the G21 region, and has been developed under the auspices of G21, which is an alliance of five Councils (Greater Geelong, Surf Coast, Colac Otway, Golden Plains and Queenscliffe) and more than 150 participating local organisations.

In recognition of its importance, a number of stakeholders have contributed funding towards the project. These include:

1. G21, the Geelong Region Alliance
2. Smart Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network
3. City of Greater Geelong
4. Geelong Region Vocational Education Council

The information presented in this Report, and the companion Business Plan, is based on substantial work done by the steering committee over the last four years, as well as interviews, forums, surveys and research on local, national and international trends.

There has been much discussion both nationally and internationally concerning skill shortages and the resultant impact on economic growth. There are also significant consequences for individuals trying to manage their career paths within a framework of shifting industry needs. In a recent OECD study involving 14 countries, research found 'career guidance services as being of value, not only to the individuals who engage with them, but to society as a whole.

Countries around the world have developed various strategies to address their own skills shortage issues. New Zealand is encouraging migration of skilled workers; the US has focused on building a demand driven workforce system to address shortages and equip workers to adapt to the competitive challenges of the 21st century; and the UK is focusing on improving the basic skills of its workforce. In Canada, it has been recognised that strategies can best be developed at the local level and the Canadian Government has funded the territories and provinces for such endeavours. However, there are barriers to communication and information on skill shortages. A recent conference in Tokyo described the difficulties experienced by many countries in accessing the latest information on innovative training policies, practices and systems reform, and noted that there are few networks available to facilitate the exchange of information.

In this internationally competitive environment, career guidance becomes critical and strategic. Many countries see that effective careers advice is an integral component of addressing skills shortages and addressing employment imbalances. The OECD defines career guidance as,

'... services intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers ... They include career information (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, career education and career management programmes, taster programmes, work search programmes, and transition services.'

More than ever, Australia finds itself competing on a world market to attract industry and a skilled workforce. Economies around the world are in growth mode

and seeking to increase their workforces through recruitment. This only exacerbates Australia's skills shortage.

Today, the focus is on building partnerships with other stakeholders to develop and implement effective strategies to address the skills shortage issue. The comfort and stability of one skill set for a lifetime career is quickly evaporating. As organisations seek to fill vacancies through alternate methods, such as looking to 'poach' people with relevant skills from other industries, employers will need more immediate and relevant advice on local labour market conditions, and individuals will need more comprehensive, and more continuous, career advice.

At the State and Territory level in Australia, there are many initiatives that clearly highlight the importance of, and concern with, skills shortages. The NT's Department of Employment, Education and Training's report on *Workforce NT Report 2006*, state that 'One of the key constraints to achieving sound and sustainable economic growth in the future is the capacity of employers to obtain employees with the level of skills and ability they require.' In 2006, the ACT Department of Education and Training undertook industry consultation to gather information on the perception of skills training through the ACT VET system. One of the key findings was 'a need for a one-stop-shop for employers, RTOs and trainees/apprentices.' State governments from around the country have endorsed and initiated strategies to deal with skills shortages.

The G21 Region has five local Councils, each with its own strategic plan. All of these have strong references to the skills shortages experienced by local industry. The City of Greater Geelong expects 5,000 new employment opportunities over the next four years and has recognised the resultant need for workforce skilling, upskilling and reskilling. The Surf Coast Shire notes the need for 'active engagement between the Council, private and public training providers, the ACC and the SGRLLEN, to undertake forward planning and a gap analysis in relation to future projected training requirements and skills needs'.

The G21 Region has identified a number of local skills challenges. These include:

- An ageing population;
- High youth unemployment;
- Expected significant population growth
- A large proportion of the workforce is made up of small to medium enterprises, which do not have significant human resource management experience.

Effective careers advice is one strategy which can contribute to addressing these issues. There are a number of ways in which careers advice can be delivered, and a number of different client groups to whom it can be delivered. A variety of current services provided throughout Australia were analysed in a case method framework as part of this research. The key learnings included:

- The importance of ensuring that potential co-located partners are chosen to enhance service delivery and, where relevant, to 'blend' services.
- The need for an independent organisation which allows for the management and brokering of services that enable future flexibility.
- The importance of maximising resources through partnering arrangements with other service providers.
- The need for services to be delivered through a range of mechanisms including shopfront, telephone, web-based advice and outreach.

In surveys and forums conducted in the region, there was a strong consensus that a Career and Skills Store was required for the following reasons:

- Current career services are dispersed and disjointed
- There is a lack of awareness of career options available
- As a response to the regional skills shortages
- To enhance the coordination and linkage of current services for a more effective, holistic and informed approach

Respondents saw the following as key elements for the Careers and Skills Store:

- matching career paths with industry needs
- independent advice that supports the current programs available by creating a central hub of information and services dealing with careers and skill information
- delivery of a wide range of information & services in order to present a viable option as the first port of call for career information
- services focused on career advice, industry skill needs and support for employers' labour market needs

Further comments from surveys and forums foresaw many benefits to be derived from the Career and Skills Store for a variety of stakeholders. These included improved self awareness with regard to career interests for individuals, a reduction of the skills shortage in the region, improved understanding by employers of current and future workforce needs, a source of excellence in careers education and advice, and improved regional information through coordination, research and centralised communication.

Most organisations surveyed anticipated some involvement between their services and the Career and Skills Store. For some it was simply as a source of information and advice to both themselves and their own target groups. However, for others, a more significant relationship was envisaged. This ranged from having a part-time 'visiting' presence in the Career and Skills Store through to full co-location.

Comments on the location requirements for the Career and Skills Store highlighted the need for high visibility, high foot traffic, accessibility, proximity to public transport and other services related to career and skills support.

When examining the structure of the Career and Skills Store, three possible models emerge based on location, service and clients. The models range from a high traffic retail setting in a mall with tightly focused service delivery, to a much larger setting that allows for events and co-location.

Model 1 - Retail Signpost

This model envisages the Career and Skills Store within a mall retail setting with high foot traffic. By virtue of its busy location, the store will be highly recognised and visible to a number of 'impulse shoppers'. The services will be focused on providing information on how and where to find career and skill support. Where there is individual advice, the one-to-one support will be a mix of self-administered testing along with short debriefs with a careers counsellor. Much of the information will be achieved by individuals browsing, discussing and taking away material. The store will engage a large number of individuals within the community but will be limited in services, especially for secondary and tertiary customer groups.

Model 2 - Meeting Space

This model provides meeting spaces such as conference space and training rooms in a location that is within the CBD area, with medium to high foot traffic. This is likely to be close to the malls or even located in an office space within the mall.

This meeting space will allow for greater engagement of stakeholder groups and associations, providing the opportunity to delve deeper into local issues on career and skills development.

By virtue of high visibility, but outside an internal mall retail space, the individual clientele attracted are likely to be fewer but more committed to engaging in the process of career and skills development. Whilst setting barriers to access is not an appropriate strategy, a large number of casual, 'impulse shoppers' in a retail setting can be a limiting factor in providing meaningful one-to-one support.

The challenge for this model is to build the image of what the Career and Skills Store stands for and who it can help. Whilst this service will be important to students and the disadvantaged, it will also need to attract the attention of post-school leavers of all ages.

Model 3 - Collaboration Centre

In addition to the meeting space, this model provides for the co-location of other career and skills associated service providers within the community. Whilst this site may be within the central CBD area, by virtue of its larger size requirements, it is more likely to be cost effective if it is located in the CBD medium traffic area.

This model will provide a wider variety of career and skills related services with depth and synergy through co-location. This site will provide a 'destination' focus for many groups and will have a greater chance of creating a 'one-stop-shop' image for career and skills support.

A model with co-located services allows for strong economies of scale in managing costs, bidding for projects, and sharing of information about national, state and regional issues surrounding career and skills support. Co-location also provides flexibility to modify services over time to meet the changing community needs and respond to changing government initiatives.

This final model is the preferred model for the Career and Skills Store. It will provide for the needs of all customer and stakeholder groups to be met and will allow for growth and development of new services into the future. Further the collaborative effort and synergies will allow for more effective outcomes and economies of scale. Finally, it must be recognised that clients are looking for a one stop shop for answers and service. Not only is this important for career changers, but also for related client groups such as industry, employers, careers teachers and organisations servicing disadvantaged groups.

More detail and costings for this model can be found in the G21 Region Career and Skills Store Business Plan, which covers location, structure, governance and service provision.

Careers

Skills



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