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YEAR 12 OR EQUIVALENT  
ATTAINMENT PROJECT:  
**2013-2014 PREPARATORY PHASE**



# FOREWORD

**THE GREAT SOUTH COAST IS LOCATED IN THE SOUTH WEST REGION OF VICTORIA. IT COMPRISES THE MUNICIPALITIES OF COLAC-OTWAY, CORANGAMITE, GLENELG, MOYNE, SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS AND WARRNAMBOOL.**

The region has in place a formal alliance of government, business and the community, all working collectively to enhance our way of life. This alliance is the Great South Coast Group Inc.

The group aspires to creating a thriving, multi-faceted and resilient economy, all the while valuing and protecting our natural resources and environment. The group's focus is on ensuring the people who live in our region have access to quality education options, are healthy and enjoy great lifestyle choices.

Population growth, changing and emerging industries, environmental impacts and the health of our people are set to create considerable challenges for our region.

In an increasingly complex world, it is becoming more challenging for our young people to transition between childhood and adulthood in a manner that reflects their potential.

Young people in our region are more likely to drop out of school and compared to their peers in other regions are more likely to experience family violence, child abuse, the impacts of binge drinking, juvenile crime, teen pregnancy and mental health issues.

Our current generation of young people in the Great South Coast reflects poorer education, life skills levels and health than their peers across the state.

The number of our young people who are not making a successful transition to long term, full time employment is significant and compares unfavourably with other regions.

There is a tendency to lay blame on parents and families, on schools, on lack of government resources or on the children themselves.

But it does not need to be this way. If we work together we can arrest and address this issue.

*The number of our young people who are not making a successful transition to long term, full time employment is significant and compares unfavourably with other regions.*

The skills required in the workplace have changed. The Great South Coast is poised to exploit some of the opportunities which exist in developing industries throughout the region. Investment is strong and if we are able to capitalise on our human potential, we will thrive.

Our future prosperity will rely heavily on working together at a community level on accepting, acknowledging and responding assertively to our current situation. This means we must all believe that a shift in the way we do things will contribute to more knowledgeable and more productive communities.

We must also value the potential of all citizens, investing in those who are less able to successfully navigate their way through adolescence in a way which ensures that they will be employed and will contribute positively in the community.

This requires a cultural shift in the way that communities and service providers work with our young people.

At the moment we work in silos, there is considerable duplication of service provision and we are not improving our outcomes. It is time for a rethink.

How can we work together in a different way?

How can we develop a collective sense of urgency about the need for change?

How can we reassure people that by working together we create strong communities which will be far more prosperous?

This document outlines a priority project for the Great South Coast that aims to increase the level of educational attainment of our young people. It explains why there is urgent need for the project, what the project aims to achieve and how it will proceed.

We fully support the goals of the Great South Coast Year 12 equivalent attainment priority project and look forward to being a part of a movement that unites governments, the education sector, community services, the health and justice sectors, workplaces, families and communities to work together to achieve better life outcomes for our young people.

The life chances and choices of young people help them to ensure they reach their fullest potential and they are the shared responsibility of everyone in our community.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris O'Connor".

**Cr. Chris O'Connor**  
Chair of the Great South Coast Inc.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vicky Mason".

**Vicky Mason**  
Chair of the Great South Coast Strengthen our Communities pillar

# EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The completion of upper secondary education has become an important international benchmark.

It is increasingly recognised as the minimum level of education needed for participation in further study and in the labour force.

Over time secondary school completion has also become more and more influential in determining how economic and other life benefits, such as good health and well-being, are distributed. As a consequence, many countries, including Australia, have established targets for attainment.

The National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions was agreed by the Council of Australian governments (COAG). In 2009 the partnership set a target of 90 per cent of students completing Year 12 or a Certificate II or above by 2015 (the target for Victoria is 92.6%) with a further target of 90 per cent completing Year 12 or a Certificate III by 2020.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the range of state and federal initiatives in place to address the issue, school retention rates in Australia have remained constant.

A recent audit completed by the Victorian Auditor-General reviewed whether the support provided to students to complete their schooling to Year 12 or equivalent was effective. It also reviewed whether strategies, programs and initiatives developed and implemented by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) have increased the number of 19 year olds completing a Year 12 or equivalent certificate.<sup>2</sup>

The audit found that there has been a failure to significantly improve student completion rates in the past 10 years.<sup>3</sup> The audit also found:

- Victoria's completion rates have not improved since 2008.<sup>4</sup>
- DEECD strategies have never substantially improved completion rates for students from non-metropolitan and low socio-economic status areas, who have lower completion rates than the Victorian average.<sup>5</sup>

Rates of completion of upper secondary education in the Great South Coast are well below the Victorian average. This is a matter of grave concern because difficulties for young people who are early school leavers, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, not only have an impact on their financial opportunities but can influence a range of social and health problems such as lack of confidence and motivation, depression, substance abuse, homelessness and criminal behaviour. These issues then become community concerns and costs.

Year 12 attainment levels have a direct bearing on the region's capacity to meet its employment requirements into the future. Given the expectations of employment growth and new investment flagged for the Great South Coast, urgent, collective, intervention strategies are needed to build and maintain our workforce.

## Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates: 2006 and 2011

	'06	'11
Queenscliffe (G21)	78.4	76.5
Surf Coast (G21)	72.8	75.5
Greater Geelong (G21)	68	69.8
Golden Plains (G21)	58.7	61.8
Warrnambool	61.8	60.6
Colac Otway	54.2	57.2
Moyne	55.7	57
Southern Grampians	57	56
Corangamite	53.6	52.5
Glenelg	48.4	51
G21	68	69.9
<b>Great South Coast</b>	<b>56.5</b>	<b>57</b>
Regional Victoria	60.4	61.6
Metropolitan Victoria	74.5	77.7
<b>Victoria</b>	<b>71.5</b>	<b>74.4</b>





# PRIORITY REGIONAL PROJECT

Poor school completion rates in the region have been recognised in the Great South Coast Regional Strategic Plan.<sup>6</sup> Released in August 2010, this plan addresses the challenges and opportunities that the region will face and presents new ways of working together to achieve a shared vision for the region's future challenges, issues and opportunities.

The plan has resulted in the formation of the Great South Coast Group which has the responsibility for delivery of the region's strategic plan.

The role of the Great South Coast Group is not to determine how an issue will be addressed, but to encourage and support groups to work together to plan initial scoping work required to address issues and challenges.

In September 2012 a regional working group was formed to consider how to address the poor education outcomes for the region. The working group set about raising awareness of the rates of school completion in the region, what the issue means and the consequences of not addressing the problem.

The working group believed that the severity of the problem and the enormity of addressing it warranted its status as a priority project for the Great South Coast region.

Projects that are formally recognised as regional priority projects are championed by the Great South Coast Group at state and federal levels. Priority projects are given a status that makes them more likely to be successful in getting funding and support from government or other sources.

The working group developed a proposal for the Great South Coast Group that did not involve 'solutions' but sought support for a preparatory phase to work with a broad range of stakeholders to develop long term action plans to embed systemic change.

On 1 February 2013 the Great South Coast Group formally endorsed Year 12 or equivalent attainment as a priority project for the region.



# PROJECT'S APPROACH

The focus of the project's working group involves new approaches of working together and doing things differently. The approach of the working group involves a combination of the following.

## 2013 PREPARATORY PHASE

Building momentum for the project, facilitating the development of solutions to improve school completion in the Great South Coast region and nurturing a strong commitment for change from a broad range of stakeholders will be the focus throughout 2013. The group has established the following goal for this phase:

By the end of 2013 we will have developed a well-supported set of community based action plans informed by a framework of strong leadership, good governance and effective consultation.

## INTEGRATED CONTINUUM PATHWAY

The education and wellbeing of children and therefore their life courses are influenced by many factors—some are protective (such as freedom from discrimination) while others are risks (such as family instability, conflict or violence).

For children and families, development is shaped by the ongoing interplay among sources of risk or vulnerability on the one hand, and sources of resilience or protection on the other. Single risk factors on their own are not usually sufficient to explain adverse developmental outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

For this reason it is appropriate to intervene before risk factors cluster and cumulate and to implement prevention initiatives along the pathway of a young person from birth until early adulthood.

This is supported by the growing recognition that the current approach of waiting until developmental problems have become established and then responding is both costly and ineffective.

.....  
THE PROJECT'S ACTION PLANS WILL IDENTIFY PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PRIORITIES ALONG A CONTINUUM OF CARE PATHWAY THAT FOLLOWS THE LIFE OF A YOUNG PERSON AND THEIR FAMILY FROM ANTENATAL UNTIL EARLY ADULTHOOD (0-19 YEARS).  
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## EARLY YEARS

While efforts to address early school leaving have tended to focus on the secondary school years, there is a growing understanding of the significance of early years, including the antenatal period, and the impact this stage has on a person's development and life course.

Early experiences set children on development trajectories that become progressively more difficult to modify as they get older<sup>8</sup> and research indicates that many problems that impact on individual adults and communities—such as obesity, mental health issues, family violence, poor literacy, early school leaving and unemployment—may be directly related to the early years of life, including the prenatal stages of development.

There is sound evidence that prevention and intervention strategies applied early in life are more effective for individual outcomes, and deliver a better economic return, than intervention applied later in life.<sup>9</sup>

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THE PROJECT'S ACTION PLANS WILL FOCUS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY DETECTION OF EMERGING PROBLEMS.  
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## FAMILIES AND PARENTING

Families play a critical role in their child’s development and learning. A large body of research provides strong evidence that parents and the home environment are the most influential forces in positively shaping children’s early learning. The responsiveness of parents to their children, and the manner in which parents talk with and teach their children are important determinants of children’s later wellbeing and development.<sup>10</sup>

While a majority of children and families are doing well, circumstances for families who are raising young children are changing.

Parenting has become more complex and challenging than in earlier times. Extended families tend to be smaller and more spread out; rates of single parent families are higher; some parents are parenting without having had the models and benefit of good parenting themselves; and many workplaces continue to lack family-friendly policies that can offer support to parents.<sup>11</sup>

Parenting style has been found to be the most important modifiable influence on young children’s behaviour<sup>12</sup> and there are a number of programs proven effective in helping parents become more nurturing, manage their children’s behaviour more effectively and promote their children’s language and literacy.<sup>13</sup>

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 THE PROJECT’S ACTION PLANS WILL IDENTIFY PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT PARENTS TO RAISE FAMILIES.  
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## PRIMARY SCHOOL YEARS

Gaps in children’s functioning and achievement develop early and are significant by the time they reach school, and schools may have difficulties changing children’s developmental trajectories.<sup>14</sup>

Locally there is a view held by some teachers, school welfare staff and community workers that early interventions for children and their families that target from birth until 8 years, need to continue throughout the primary school years.

There are critical gaps in policies and services for the middle years (children aged 8-12), which means they often go unsupported at this critical time, including the transition from primary to secondary school.<sup>15</sup>

Adolescence is starting earlier and finishing later. This shift demands a rethink about how we respond to children, young people and young adults.<sup>16</sup>

There is a growing recognition that collaboration and partnerships within and between schools is essential to enable schools to meet the current and future needs of students.

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 THE PROJECT’S ACTION PLANS WILL IDENTIFY CRITICAL GAPS IN THE 0-19 CONTINUUM AND DEVELOP GOALS TO REDRESS IDENTIFIED GAPS.  
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## SECONDARY SCHOOL YEARS

The decision to leave school early comes at the end of a long process. It is not a single act or event but the culmination of many years of interaction between a young person, his or her parents, teachers, and the school and community contexts in which he or she develops.<sup>17</sup>

Those who do leave early have often been thinking about leaving for some time.<sup>18</sup>

Mostly, early leavers display several risk factors rather than just one factor—underachievement, poor academic motivation, disengagement from school and poor peer relations are significant predictors of early school leaving.<sup>19</sup>

A summary of advice from international experts points to the importance of considering strategies which are both curative and preventative in nature. Curative approaches include developing or improving pathways back into education or vocational learning, both in and out of school, ensuring reliable data and enabling appropriate targeting of resources and evaluation of initiatives. Preventative approaches include bridging the gap between vocational and academic education and strengthening transition stages.

.....  
 THE PROJECT’S ACTION PLANS WILL IDENTIFY PRIORITIES WHICH ARE BOTH CURATIVE AND PREVENTATIVE IN NATURE.  
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## REGIONAL AND RURAL APPROACH

Young people living in regional and remote areas often do not achieve the same educational outcomes as other young Australians.

Research tells us that schools in regional and remote areas have higher teacher shortages and teacher turnover. They have higher average costs due to small enrolment numbers, greater distance and more limited access to facilities and resources. Regional and remote areas are also typically characterised by lower SES communities, offer fewer opportunities for further studies and have fewer work opportunities. These factors undoubtedly have a negative impact on the quality of education provided and influence the attitudes and aspirations of students, which in turn impacts student performance.<sup>20</sup>

In the Great South Coast region access to transport is a contributing factor to this inequity.

Another contributing factor is that smaller regional schools have fewer teachers, limiting the teaching styles exposed to students. This can also cause problems for these students if they experience problems with particular teachers.<sup>21</sup>

Another possible reason may be because more jobs requiring lower skills are available outside metropolitan areas.<sup>22</sup>

Aside from the education sector, young people require access to a number of programs and services along the 0-19 continuum. Accessible services are physically accessible, economically accessible (affordable), appropriate (comprehensive and non-discriminatory) and acceptable (respect and acknowledge culture).

Isolation and access to transport in rural and regional areas creates a barrier to accessible services and programs.

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THE PROJECT'S ACTION PLANS WILL ADDRESS ISSUES OF ACCESS AND DISADVANTAGE NECESSARY FOR THE GREAT SOUTH COAST.  
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## UNITED COMMUNITY APPROACH

The Great South Coast Year 12 or equivalent attainment working group believes that ensuring that our young people achieve an end of school qualification is not an issue that is the sole responsibility of schools, the education sector and governments.

Rather a united community response is required to improve school completion rates involving governments, the education sector, the philanthropic sector, community services, the health and justice sectors, workplaces, industries, families and communities.

Long term solutions to address systemic change require cross sectoral collaboration and the working group will draw on the expertise of the Local Learning and Employment Networks and the Primary Care Partnerships in developing high functioning, strategic, regional partnerships.

In the second half of 2013 and at the beginning of 2014, the working group will enlist a range of stakeholders from across the age continuum (0-19) who have a role in impacting education and development to help achieve the project's goals locally and regionally. This will involve building a common understanding of the issues, a shared vision for the future and agreed objectives for action.

The preparatory phase will stimulate activities to encourage stakeholders to consider how to best align existing resources and funding by working together to target effort rather than operating in silos.

.....  
THE PROJECT WILL DEVELOP A SET OF ACTIONS INVOLVING A UNITED, WHOLE OF COMMUNITY, AGREED RESPONSE THAT IS UNDERPINNED BY COMMITMENT TO LONG TERM INVOLVEMENT FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLANS.  
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## VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT REFORMS

Victoria is undergoing major and unprecedented reforms:

- > Victoria's Department of Human Services is undergoing reforms that focus on integrated service coordination, the client and early intervention.<sup>23</sup>
- > Victoria's Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is also undertaking reforms with the aim of improving the life chances and contributions of all young Victorians.<sup>24</sup>
- > Victoria's Vulnerable Children strategy 2013-2022 takes a decade-long horizon view to drive sustained change for at risk children and those in the statutory system.<sup>25</sup>
- > The 2013 Service Sector Reform project aims to improve how government and the community sector work together to improve the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians.<sup>26</sup>

The Great South Coast Year 12 or equivalent attainment working group recognise this changing landscape and believe the region's Year 12 or equivalent attainment priority project has direct relevance to these reforms.

The working group believe that their overall approach to this project will provide the Victorian government with an exemplar for regional Victoria and the Premier of Victoria and other Ministers have expressed their interest in the development of this project.

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THE PROJECT WILL ENDEAVOUR TO KEEP THE FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS INFORMED OF THE PROJECT AND ITS PROGRESS.  
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# 2013–2014 PREPARATORY PHASE

The project's working group has allocated 2013 and the beginning of 2014 as a 'preparatory phase'.

## GREAT SOUTH COAST YEAR 12 OR EQUIVALENT ATTAINMENT PROJECT PHASE 1: PREPARATORY PHASE JANUARY 2013—MARCH 2014

Goal: To produce a well-supported set of community based action plans informed by a framework of strong leadership, good governance and effective consultation

Establish working group with membership from across the region

Develop and implement a Communication Plan

Develop a key stakeholder database to inform the project

Undertake a data project to identify key indicators of Year 12 or equivalent attainment performance across the Great South Coast

Hold a regional forum to inform the local narrative on Year 12 or equivalent attainment

Develop report cards which articulate clearly how Great South Coast LGAs and the broader region are performing in relation to Year 12 or equivalent attainment

Commence development of a set of community based action plans

Finalise and endorse Community Based Action Plans

Establish a new Steering Group to coordinate long term implementation of the endorsed Community Based Action Plans

## AFTER PREPARATORY PHASE

Upon completion of the preparatory phase, the project's working group will cease and a new steering group will be formed. This group will have the responsibility of implementation and evaluation of the action plans developed in 2013-14.





## WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

At the time of publication, the Great South Coast Year 12 or equivalent attainment working group's members included:

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