

## Discussion paper for Roundtable Workshops

### Purpose of this document

This document provides participants in the *Regional Youth Commitments*<sup>1</sup> (RYC) Roundtable workshops with some general information about the formative evaluation, what to expect from the workshops and how participants can contribute on the day. It also summarises some general findings obtained to date from interviews with Project Officers and an online survey of stakeholders held in early February.

### About the formative evaluation of the *Regional Youth Commitments* initiative

dandolopartners has been engaged by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) to conduct a *formative evaluation* of the RYC initiative. A formative evaluation is one which occurs in the course of a program or initiative, and is generally designed to improve or increase its success.

The objectives of this evaluation are to:

- Determine the level of clarity about roles and responsibilities in the initiative
- Evaluate achievements to date
- Identify critical success factors and good practices that may be useful to share amongst the regions
- Identify opportunities for potential improvement, and
- Identify the sustainability of the commitments beyond the initial phase funded by DEECD.

It is important that stakeholders recognise that the evaluation is not intended to provide a final summation of a region's success or achievements with the RYC, and will accommodate differences across regions in the maturity of the RYC.

The formative evaluation is based on direct research into stakeholders' views, using a range of techniques including an online survey, Roundtable workshops, and follow-up telephone interviews.

Eight Roundtable workshops will be held in each of the regions participating in the RYC.

### What to expect from the workshops

The workshops will run for approximately 3 hours, and will be facilitated by dandolopartners' personnel. Our facilitators have worked in the education sector previously, are experienced in running focus groups, and are very approachable.

The workshop agenda is divided into three main sections:

1. Background to your region's RYC and achievements to date
2. What has and has not worked, and how this can be capitalized upon
3. The future of the initiative, including next steps and any barriers that need to be overcome.

Due to the different stages of implementation of the RYC in each of the 8 regions, some topics may be introduced that may not appear to be directly relevant to your region. They may nevertheless be important to the evaluation itself, and we ask that you engage as much as you can with the topics, even if the details are sketchy.

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<sup>1</sup> RYC is known by a variety of names across the regions.

Workshops will be audio-recorded for record keeping purposes and for dandolopartners' use only.

### **Your involvement in the workshops**

You have been invited to attend as a stakeholder in the RYC in your region. We understand that your views do not necessarily represent those of others within your organization, or other organizations in the same category as yours.

Your active feedback, frank and honest views will make an important contribution to improving the effectiveness and sustainability of the RYC initiative. Your views will not be quoted or attributed directly to you.

The agenda for the workshop is quite tight, and facilitators will need your help in getting through all the areas we need to cover. We encourage you to be fulsome, but concise, in your comments. If the discussion gets stuck on an issue, the facilitator may suggest that the group move onto the next matter, or that the issue be followed-up at a later time.

### **What we have learned about the RYC to date**

So far we have spoken with Project Officers in each of the regions, and have analysed the results of an online survey of stakeholders.

Prior to the workshops, we thought you might be interested in some key findings from this research, which indicates:

1. Regions are in different stages of development – with some are very early in implementation, and others having already made the transition beyond the initial 12 month DEECD funded phase.
2. In rolling out the RYC, regions have faced a range of challenges, including those related to:
  - a. Identifying key stakeholders
  - b. Convincing stakeholders of the need to act
  - c. Aligning pre-existing programs and activities with the RYC
  - d. Securing suitably qualified staff
  - e. Defining the commitment
  - f. Developing systems and protocols for referral of students at risk, and
  - g. Tracking and monitoring impacts.
3. On average, survey respondents have been involved in the RYC for almost a year, with most seeing their RYC as being still in an implementation stage. For some, the initiative has made a slow start, but is now achieving momentum – this is especially true for regions in early implementation. For others, it is too early to tell.
4. The RYC is generally perceived as one of the top priorities in the region.
5. Most respondents believe their roles and responsibilities are reasonably clear, and that stakeholders have common views on the objectives of the RYC.
6. Many respondents do not yet believe that the RYC has resulted in better retention and re-engagement rates for young people at risk, but think however that it has been effective in developing awareness, consensus and stakeholders' intention to act.

7. Respondents have highlighted building trust, leadership, LLEN involvement and a collaborative approach as important to success of the initiative. They are positive about the performance of the initiative to date in terms of administration and project management, but less so about the availability of local funding to maintain the initiative.
8. Most respondents believe that their regions are well prepared for continuation beyond the initial DEECD 12 month funded phase. Confidence is higher amongst those regions which are more advanced in their implementation. A small number of respondents don't think they are well prepared, but believe this can be addressed.
9. The majority of respondents believe that it is possible they will continue to be involved in the initiative.

### **Closing remarks**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this formative evaluation. We appreciate the time you have taken from your usual responsibilities to help us identify ways in which the RYC can be made a better and more sustainable initiative – one that ultimately changes the lifetime opportunities available to young people who are either disengaged or at risk of not completing Year 12 or equivalent.

A key output of the evaluation is a final report expected in June 2008. It is intended that the project findings and specific advice on the next steps will be circulated to each region for distribution to key stakeholders.

The Project Officer for RYC or the nominated person in each region is the contact point for your Regional Youth Commitment.