

# APPENDIX A

## Submissions and comments

We have consulted with DET and the associated entities and we considered their views when reaching our audit conclusions. As required by the *Audit Act 1994*, we gave a draft copy of this report, or relevant extracts, to those agencies and asked for their submissions and comments.

Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of those comments rests solely with the agency head.

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### Responses were received as follows:

DET .....	28
Jesuit Social Services.....	32
Mission Australia .....	34

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## Department of Education and Training

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Mr Andrew Greaves  
Auditor-General  
Victorian Auditor-General's Office  
Level 31, 35 Collins Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Dear Mr Greaves

### **Proposed report: Effectiveness of the Navigator Program**

Thank you for the letter of 24 February 2022 and the opportunity to respond to the proposed report for this performance audit.

The Department of Education and Training is committed to ensuring its programs are designed to achieve the best learning and development outcomes for all learners.

The Navigator program is an important part of the department's support for students at risk of disengaging with education. As your report describes, Navigator works with highly vulnerable young people and the tailored support the program provides helps these young people to stay connected to education and achieve a range of positive outcomes.

Following the statewide rollout of Navigator in 2021, the department is now in a strong position to deliver actions that will drive continuous improvement for the program and maximise its impact on young people across Victoria. I welcome the opportunity that this audit provides to inform the actions the department will take to ensure the full potential of this program is realised. The department welcomes the report's recommendations and accepts them in full. An action plan that addresses the recommendations in the report is enclosed.

The department acknowledges the data limitations that have not allowed VAGO to fully assess the effectiveness of the program. In parallel to the audit process, the department has identified the data gaps that could impede assessment of outcomes and performance and has invested in data system upgrades to address these issues. The upgraded system has been operating since late 2021 and will see significant improvements in outcomes measurement and monitoring from 2022 onwards.

Your details will be dealt with in accordance with the Public Records Act 1973 and the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014. Should you have any queries or wish to gain access to your personal information held by this department please contact our Privacy Officer at the above address.



Should you wish to discuss the department's response, please contact Bella Stagoll, Executive Director, Integrity, Assurance and Executive Services Division on (03) 7022 0120 or [bella.stagoll@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:bella.stagoll@education.vic.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



**Jenny Atta**  
Secretary  
11 / 03 / 2022

Your details will be dealt with in accordance with the *Public Records Act 1973* and the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*. Should you have any queries or wish to gain access to your personal information held by this department please contact our Privacy Officer at the above address.



## DET action plan: Effectiveness of the Navigator program

#	Recommendations that DET:	Response	#	The Department will:	By the end of:
1	develop a Navigator engagement strategy so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>schools understand and consistently apply DET's tiered system of support for highly disengaged students</li> <li>area teams support and monitor schools to provide individualised support for highly disengaged students</li> <li>students receive a timely referral to Navigator after receiving individualised support, whether school-based or using DET's area teams.</li> </ul>	Accept	1.1	Review and update advice and resources for schools in consultation with schools and area staff.	March 2023
			1.2	Develop engagement strategies for DET Area teams to support schools' understanding and application of health, wellbeing and engagement interventions and supports.	March 2023
2	improve oversight and follow-up of schools to ensure consistent application of DET's tiered system of support and referral practices.	Accept	2.1	Review and improve current levels of oversight of, and support for, schools provided through the Department's area and regional staff to ensure consistent application of DET's tiered system of support and referral practices.	March 2023
			2.2	Undertake regular data analysis of attendance, absences and use of available programs, including Navigator referrals to identify schools who can benefit from increased support.	Established by June 2022 and ongoing
3	monitor program demand and use this information for continuous program improvement, including to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reduce waiting times for intensive case management services</li> <li>address variation in service access across DET areas.</li> </ul>	Accept	3.1	Use the increased data capability in the upgraded Navigator Data Management System to monitor both demand and outcomes achieved by the program.	Established by June 2022 and ongoing
			3.2	This will also inform future program funding decisions following the end of the current contract period in December 2022. Review the results of the current application of a differentiated funding model, using findings to inform broader funding decisions.	October 2022
			3.3	Continue to work with service providers where program demand is highest to increase capacity and manage referrals, including more timely use of complementary supports.	N/A as it is current and ongoing

4	<p>develop and implement a monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establishes requirements for data submission and key indicators that have clearly specified program and DET data sources, business rules and targets, that fairly represent program achievement</li> <li>identifies baseline performance levels so it can assess improvement in program performance over time</li> <li>enables fair assessment and benchmarking of individual service providers in meeting Navigator's objectives and outcomes</li> <li>enables routine public reporting against the achievement of Navigator outcomes</li> <li>allows for continuous improvement in the design and implementation of the program, including eligibility criteria.</li> </ul>	Accept	4.1	<p>Implement a monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework to coincide with the new contract period.</p>	December 2022
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Mr Andrew Greaves  
Auditor General  
Victorian Auditor General's Office  
Level 31/35 Collins Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

10 March 2022

Dear Mr Greaves,

**Re: Proposed Performance Audit Report Effectiveness of the Navigator program**

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Performance Audit of the Effectiveness of the Navigator Program. Jesuit Social Services commends the work undertaken by the Victorian Auditor General's Office on this audit. As we outline in further detail below, Jesuit Social Services would welcome greater consideration of the way in which Navigator's success is measured to ensure the true extent of its effectiveness can be understood.

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential. For 45 years we have been working with some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised members of our communities, who often experience multiple and complex challenges. We have actively contributed to the development and delivery of the Navigator program since it was first piloted in 2016.

Navigator provides critical supports to young people to reengage them in educational and learning pathways. This gives them the foundational skills and opportunities they need to flourish. As noted by one young person who participated in the program:

*[Navigator] really helped me see the importance of education... [It] also helped me with the communication between my family and friends. I am now in Year 9 and doing really well. [I] would 100 per cent recommend Navigator to anyone who was struggling with school. Thank you.*

We support the recommendations in the audit report noting these will strengthen assistance for Victoria's most disengaged students. We are pleased to see the report recommendations to address inconsistent school practice in referring students to Navigator. Timely referrals of eligible students and their families are critical to ensuring disengaged students receive the support they need.

Further, we welcome the recommendation for the Department of Education and Training (DET) to develop a robust monitoring and evaluation framework that fairly represents program achievements. It is critical that participant progress is monitored across multiple domains including: connection to family and friends; their view of the future; and the strength and importance of pro-social networks and relationships. This promotion of meaningful and reciprocal relationships, and the valuing of self and others is fundamental to Jesuit Social Services' *Our Way of Working* practice framework. Such an approach enables a nuanced understanding of wellbeing.

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Jesuit Social Services would like to see an appropriate level of funding to support DET and the providers of Navigator to work together to address the report recommendations.

We also wish to highlight the following areas in relation to the ongoing development of Navigator:

#### **Measuring success**

Navigator is delivered in communities where there is entrenched and persistent disadvantage. Outcome metrics must be contextualised in the program's environment and recognise that persistent disadvantage will affect engagement with the program, and therefore its impact.

Evaluations must take into account the particular barriers faced by young people who are disengaged from learning, including family violence, poverty, housing stress and homelessness, mental health and substance misuse issues, inadequate access to health services, engagement with child protection, and challenges faced by newly arrived young people. While re-engagement in education is the primary goal of the program, this is a long term objective and many of these barriers also need to be addressed. As outlined above, measuring success of the program must be broadened beyond school attendance to include positive outcomes in other domains, including family wellbeing, community connectedness, and social and recreation networks.

#### **Targeted support for children as early as possible**

All children at risk of disengaging from education must have access to tailored support as early as possible. Reducing the age of eligibility for Navigator to ten years old and enabling alignment with other services, such as through the Department of Justice and Community Safety and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, would ensure we are able to connect much earlier with vulnerable young people and address the many challenges they face in a more targeted and coordinated way.

#### **Working with families**

Navigator staff are required to work holistically with the families of young people who have disengaged from learning and present with multiple and complex needs. Jesuit Social Services strongly supports this model of integrated child and family support. This critical aspect of the program should be included in any discussion of its effectiveness. Community service organisations such as Jesuit Social Services have deep knowledge of the cohort and their families and it is important that this expertise is drawn on in determining who might best benefit from the program.

Jesuit Social Services looks forward to continuing to work with DET in the ongoing development and delivery of Navigator.

Yours sincerely

**Julie Edwards, CEO, Jesuit Social Services**

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10 March 2022

Mr Andrew Greaves  
Auditor-General  
Victorian Auditor-General's Office  
Level 31 / 35 Collins Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Dear Mr Greaves

**Re: Effectiveness of the Navigator program**

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the *Effectiveness of the Navigator program* audit and to provide comments in response to this report.

Mission Australia welcomes the four recommendations by the Auditor-General and their acceptance by the Department of Education and Training (DET). We note that DET has already made changes including updating program guidelines and upgrades to the NDMS during the audit period.

As this report reflects, Navigator is an important program that is achieving results for disengaged students. Our staff see the positive outcomes young people achieve through their involvement in Navigator. Intensive case management supports have proved effective in addressing underlying issues such as poor mental health, family violence and substance use that impede on school engagement. We are pleased to see this acknowledged in the report and we hope that a future outcomes framework reflects the impact that Navigator has on non-education outcomes, and how addressing those underlying issues support school re-engagement.

We greatly welcome the recommendations that will lead to more equitable and timely access into Navigator, and reduced waiting times for intensive case management services. This will mean more students get the level of support they need and get it sooner, which we believe will result in a larger number of young people maintaining a successful connection with their education. The issue of demand versus capacity has been an ongoing challenge for Mission Australia, and we acknowledge the additional funding Navigator received in 2021-2022 is a positive step towards addressing service capacity issues.

Mission Australia is ready to assist in the implementation of the report's recommendations. We welcome the opportunity to share our experience and expertise in measuring student outcomes and providing further advice to DET from a provider perspective.

Yours sincerely

Nada Nasser  
State Director NSW/ACT/Victoria

Standing together with Australians in need until they can stand for themselves

Mission Australia ABN 15 000 002 512

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