

VET Cluster Framework Guide

Information to support schools to implement the VET Cluster Framework Policy, including the VET Cluster Transition Funding application process.

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For more information, in the first instance contact the department's Jobs, Skills and Pathways Manager (JSPM) in your area. To find your school's JSPM, contact your [regional office](#).

If you need more information, contact the department's VET Delivered to School Students (VDSS) team: vet.secondary@education.vic.gov.au

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Overview

A VET Cluster is a network of schools in an area that collaborate, often with the support of a Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN), to improve the availability VET Delivered to School Students (VDSS).

The Department of Education has developed the VET Cluster Framework (the Framework) to give schools clear, consistent guidance on how to effectively collaborate in clusters to support greater access and provision of VDSS.

It is intended to support the formation of new clusters and assist established ones. It sets out recommendations for cluster governance and operations, functions and activities, and roles and responsibilities, including the critical role of the Cluster Coordinator.

The framework applies to:

- all government secondary schools that offer VDSS
- all Catholic and independent secondary schools that elect to be members of a VET Cluster
- LLENs participating in clusters.

The department consulted with stakeholders and conducted an extensive review of the operations of existing clusters.

The Framework is modelled on best-practice examples from clusters and reflects the real-world experiences of VET coordinators, teachers, and trainers, and LLENs across the state.

Timeline for implementation

The Framework is being implemented across 2024 and 2025. The timeline will vary for individual clusters as they are at differing levels of functionality and maturity.

Ideally, clusters will begin to work through the application process for VET Cluster Transition Funding as soon as possible. This will allow LLENs to promptly employ Cluster Coordinators who can support the implementation of the Framework. Funding will be provided for a full 12 months from the receipt of the funding. The department recognises that transition funding may be required for more than 12 months to successfully implement long-term funding arrangements and is exploring ways to support clusters beyond this period, as needed.

Purpose of VET Clusters

Students benefit from their school belonging to a cluster, as it supports their access a broader range of VET options.

Schools also benefit, reducing the overall administrative burden of VDSS on schools, while fostering develop mutually beneficial partnerships with other government and non-government schools, as well as with VET providers, local employers, and industry.

Additional benefits that clusters bring include:

- improved standing and prioritisation of VDSS among school leaders, key staff, students, and the wider community
- increased shared provision of VDSS between schools, improving students' access to the VDSS core offering and efficient use of school and community infrastructure and workforce
- improved responsiveness of schools and VET providers to gaps in access and changes in student demand or local industry needs
- reduced barriers to access for students and more effective engagement with programs and supports, such as funding for transport

- improved knowledge and skills of school-based Cluster Coordinators and VET workforce.

Using the VET Cluster Framework

The purpose of the Framework is to benefit all students undertaking VDSS by enabling effective cluster coordination.

The Framework guides schools through the process of establishing a new cluster, and enables existing clusters to review their functions and activities.

Existing clusters have demonstrated that when member schools actively engage and contribute, they realise considerable benefits with regards to access to VET, while also reducing the administrative workload for individual schools and their staff.

Schools and clusters can adapt the Framework to suit their own operational requirements and the educational needs of their students.

Initially, the department's JSPMs will work with new clusters to determine how they want to use the Framework. Existing clusters may also access this support.

Clusters must engage with the Framework to access VET Cluster Transition Funding, which supports the employment of dedicated Cluster Coordinators through LLENs. The process of applying for VET Cluster Transition Funding will also be supported by JSPMs.

Finding your cluster

As part of the place-based planning process run by the department in 2022 and 2023, all government secondary schools, and Catholic and independent schools that elected to participate, were assigned to a cluster. In many cases, this was an established cluster.

The Framework is being implemented using these clusters. To check which cluster your school belongs to, refer to the contact details on the first page of this document.

Benefitting from your cluster

To benefit from their cluster, schools should:

- contribute to development of the cluster's Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding, and adhere to the provisions in both documents
- nominate staff for the Cluster's Governance Group (individual clusters will determine whether this is a principal-class member or a school-based VET Coordinator – see template Governance Terms of Reference for further information)
- actively engage in cluster operations and strategic planning, including school-based VET Coordinators attending and participating in the Cluster's Operations Group or Network.
- collaborate with other schools and providers in delivering VDSS across the cluster
- provide student application and enrolment data to facilitate analysis of VDSS trends to address access and provision challenges
- work closely with the Cluster Coordinator, LLEN, and the department's JSPM in your area
- ensure that school-based VET coordinators can attend cluster operations group meetings.

The clusters that have successfully delivered positive educational outcomes for students are those where schools are deeply involved in every aspect of cluster operations. This means that:

- school leaders are committed to ensuring the cluster is successful and participate in the Cluster's Governance Group

- school-based VET Coordinators meet regularly as a Cluster Operations Group, pooling their knowledge and experience to support the Cluster Coordinator to manage the everyday workings of the cluster, and provide professional learning for one another.

Active participation from all schools in a cluster ensures that the administrative workload for individual schools is reduced.

VET Cluster Transition Funding

VET Cluster Transition Funding supports the employment of VET Cluster Coordinators through LLENs. It is being provided to allow new clusters to become established, successful, and sustainable, and existing clusters to expand their function.

Funding is available for 12 months. This funding will commence when schools wishing to form a cluster have worked with their area's JSPM and LLEN to jointly apply.

Following approval by the department, funding will be provided to the LLEN, which will employ a VET Coordinator. Funding will be for the full 12 months following the approval. For example, if your cluster receives approval in July 2024, funding will go through to July 2025.

More detailed information on the funding application process, including the funding bands, can be found in the VET Cluster Framework Policy, and the VET Cluster Transition Funding Application Process, both of which are available from the Regional Pathways Workforce in your area.

Eligibility

All new and existing clusters can apply for VET Cluster Transition Funding.

To receive this funding, clusters must work with the Regional Pathways Workforce and LLEN to jointly develop and submit an application.

Funding rationale

In working with existing clusters in the development of the VET Cluster Framework, the department explored the funding and responsibilities of the various paid Coordination positions in place across the state. It is from this work that the funding bands for the VET Cluster Transition Funding were determined.

The level of transition funding each cluster receives will be based on bands determined by the total number of VDSS enrolments among cluster schools. The salary level for the Cluster Coordinator is recommended at Education Support 1-4-1 (or equivalent) and the Administration Support at ES 1-2-1 (or equivalent).

Funding of \$15,000 will also be provided for miscellaneous administration expenses to be determined by the cluster (for example, catering costs for cluster network meetings).

As part of the application process, clusters will develop an implementation plan, with support from the Taskforce, to review the transition funding along with contextual needs to determine the exact level of transition funding the cluster requires.

More detailed information on the funding application process, including the funding bands, can be found in the VET Cluster Framework Policy, and the VET Cluster Transition Funding Application Process, both of which are available from the Regional Pathways Workforce in your area.

VET Cluster Transition Funding is being provided for 12 months, in recognition that establishing a cluster involves considerable administrative and logistical work, and that new clusters need to be properly supported throughout this process.

The 12-month period is intended to give schools enough time to:

- experience working with a dedicated Cluster Coordinator and so understand the benefits that such a role brings
- use this experience to refine a Cluster Coordinator position description that suits their local needs and will deliver long-term benefits
- determine and implement the structure for jointly funding a dedicated long-term VET Cluster Coordinator with their LLEN.

It is important to note that in most existing clusters, either school- or LLEN-led, all members contribute to funding a VET Coordinator, and see it as core to their educational and business model. This model has proven to be the most effective at underpinning sustainable VET Clusters and ensures that schools have maximum agency over cluster governance and operations.

In these clusters, LLENs are contributing financially in line with the priorities outlined in the current School to Work program, through which all LLENs support clusters.

Schools are utilising a range of funding sources to cover these costs, including their SRP; Jobs, Skills, and Pathways Coordination Funding; and the Small Schools Base.

New and existing clusters

New clusters

The department understands that establishing a new cluster involves a considerable administrative and logistical burden. The VET Cluster Framework is designed to alleviate this by providing clear guidance on a recommended:

- Governance and operational model, including a:
 - Memorandum of Understanding
 - Governance Terms of Reference
 - VET Cluster Coordinator Position Description
- Operational and strategic functions and activities.

These recommendations provide for the first time a roadmap for schools and other stakeholders as they seek to establish a cluster. They have been modelled on best practice examples from existing clusters, meaning that they reflect the real-world experiences of VET practitioners across the state.

They are recommendations because the department recognises that the needs, opportunities, and challenges facing schools vary significantly across the state – what may work for a metropolitan cluster will not necessarily apply to a regional or rural one. Schools are therefore able to adapt the recommendations to best meet both their operational requirements and the educational needs of their students.

Existing clusters

While established school-based clusters will not be required to transition to the LLEN-facilitated model, these clusters will be eligible for transition funding if they wish to integrate the VET Cluster Framework into their existing governance and operational processes.

These clusters will have the opportunity to work with the department to review their functionality and sustainability and to identify areas that may benefit from department and LLEN support.

This approach has been informed by the fact that many clusters have operated across the state for many years, successfully delivering high-quality educational outcomes for students and member schools. These clusters are administered by a range of governance models which have been developed to suit the needs of member schools.

Roles and responsibilities

Local Learning and Employment Networks

The department selected Victoria's LLENs to facilitate cluster coordination because they:

- work with all school sectors
- are independent
- have a strong place-based focus and connections with local employers and industry
- already engage in activities that align and intersect with the work of clusters
- have an existing organisational structure and a statewide network.

The Cluster Governance Group of each cluster will provide strategic direction. The cluster's LLEN will support the cluster by partnering with cluster schools. In this supporting role, the cluster's LLEN will:

- contribute strategic leadership through engagement of the LLEN Executive Officer in cluster governance.
- employ and have direct oversight of the Cluster Coordinator.
- facilitate cluster activities.
- work closely with the Regional Pathways Workforce to:
 - implement the VET Cluster Framework and other relevant changes
 - establish new clusters
 - support existing clusters to review their functionality and sustainability and to identify areas that may benefit from department and LLEN support.

Regional Pathways Workforce

The department's Regional Pathways Workforce are area-based staff, led by JSPMs, who support schools to implement the Victoria's senior secondary pathways reform. A critical role in this is their ongoing support of clusters.

The level of support required will depend on the level of cluster functionality in their area. This role will focus on the implementation of the VET Cluster Framework by providing guidance and support to establish or enhance clusters. This will include:

- supporting clusters to review functionality, identify areas for improvement and to establish additional resources
- facilitating engagement of key stakeholders, including:
 - schools (principal-class and VET Coordinators)
 - VET providers (TAFE and private RTOs)
 - LLENs
- supporting new clusters' initial development of a shared vision and implementation of structures to support increased collaboration (for example, governance structures, regular meetings, memoranda of understanding)
- supporting existing clusters to work more strategically (for example, enhancing their processes for coordinating provision, including addressing barriers and pursuing additional opportunities).