

**What does Success Look Like?
An Evaluation of Mission Australia's
Flexible Learning Options (FLO) Program
(South Australia)**

**MISSION
AUSTRALIA**



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Executive Summary

This report has explored the impact of Mission Australia's Flexible Learning Options (FLO) Program in South Australia, which is part of a broad social inclusion initiative of the State Government's Department for Education and Child Development (DECD). It provides both qualitative and quantitative data in support of its key findings but, first and foremost, seeks to give a voice to the FLO students utilising the service. A key question associated with FLO services in South Australia has been what the nature of success looks like. Concerns over the educational outcomes associated with FLO have rightly given rise to a focus on South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) outcomes, though the remit of the SA FLO Program has always been far broader, including wellbeing enhancement, learning engagement, vocational learning pathways, as well as earning pathways. Most importantly, FLO is designed to help disengaged students re-engage with learning and critically, with casework support. Originally established as a school retention initiative FLO seeks to address the complex issues that drive non-attendance at school. This report demonstrates that these issues often relate to mental health, anxiety, learning difficulties or bullying and there is a clear risk that, if not addressed, they can lead to students becoming completely disengaged educationally, as well as socially and put in great risk as they proceed to adulthood.

With such concerns in mind this report demonstrates the powerful role that Mission Australia's FLO Program in South Australia plays in supporting 'at risk' young people, with impacts that extend far beyond simple educational attainment. Key findings and recommendations associated with this evaluation are broken down into two core areas of relevance to: (i) MA FLO's impact; and (ii) MA FLO's implementation, which are also relevant to DECD's wider FLO Program in South Australia.

MA FLO Impact Findings and Recommendations

Findings and recommendations of relevance to the impact that the MA FLO Program generates include:

- a) The MA FLO Program has a qualitative impact on the lives of the students attending the service. It offers them sustained casework support that is protective in nature. From this perspective MA FLO can be perceived as a critical component of the broader social protection and inclusion support that the Government of South Australian provides to disadvantaged and disengaged young people. In many instances FLO attendance was described by students as being personally transformative, potentially life-saving and a significant driver of re-engagement and social inclusion;
- b) Casework support is valued by MA FLO students above all other services that they access. MA FLO provides a context for students to build a meaningful relationship of trust with their caseworker and this can yield positive outcomes in terms of addressing the personal barriers to educational re-engagement that many face;
- c) MA FLO provides a flexible, safe and supportive learning space that helps to foster feelings of independence, security and tolerance amongst the students. Students are given the space to mature within the MA FLO Program free from the pressures that initially drove them to disconnect with mainstream schooling;

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- d) MA FLO helps students to reimagine what is possible, discover their ambitions and put in place strategies to achieve them. A majority of FLO students were able to identify educational or job-related forward-looking goals that they wanted to attain, and these ambitions closely correlate with their attendance at MA FLO and the casework support that they receive;
 - e) Schools, caseworkers and FLO coordinators (including teachers) work collaboratively and effectively to support the best outcomes that FLO students can achieve whether it is learning, earning or wellbeing related. Despite a concern for SACE outcomes, all recognise that tailoring outcomes to individual student needs and ambitions yields the best outcomes and highest levels of student engagement;
 - f) MA FLO students' exposure to tailored and flexible learning, in addition to ongoing casework support has a significant impact on their levels of confidence, self-organisation and self-reliance. MA FLO helps to build important life skills for vulnerable young people, which in turn increases their potential of becoming productive, responsible and socially engaged adults; and

MA FLO Implementation Findings and Recommendations

Findings and recommendations of relevance to the way in which the MA FLO Program is implemented include:

- a) 93% of MA FLO students stated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of the services received from the MA Northern FLO Program;
- b) Internal MA processes are in place to ensure compliance with DECD FLO KPIs including regular staff training, meetings and internal audits;
- c) MA FLO Flexible Learning Centres (FLCs) are identified by students as spaces that are non-threatening and respectful. Both FLO staff and students noted that there is zero tolerance for bullying or harassment. Few behavioural issues affect the delivery of teaching and the proximity of casework support means that issues that might affect teaching are dealt with quickly. The proximity/availability of casework support is critical to the ongoing wellbeing of MA FLO students;
- d) The co-location of MA FLO caseworkers with the FLO teachers at FLCs helps to align service delivery to local needs and circumstances, which in turn, enhances program delivery, levels of cooperation and the availability of support. While different FLO delivery models are evident within MA FLO's service delivery, close and frequent contact between schools, FLO coordinators and caseworkers enhances the tailoring of wellbeing and learning support and the overall protective function of the FLO program;
- e) MA FLO students cited a lack of access to specialist support within mainstream school as a reason for their learning and engagement difficulties. It was suggested that the small

number of school-based counsellors and the extent to which they are stretched across large cohorts leaves them less able to deal with the issues that many of them face, such as anxiety or bullying;

- f) MA FLO students were critical of how many times they have to repeat their 'stories' about their journey to FLO, their experiences in mainstream school and what they want to attain in the future. While the telling of these 'stories' is critical to building rapport with caseworkers and is the basis for quality service interventions, there is potential for DECD, school and FLO providers such as MA FLO to work together to enhance the handover information when a student is transitioning from mainstream school to a FLO service. Many caseworkers suggested that the information provided by schools was either non-existent or limited;
- g) The individuality of learning plans and the 'one-on-one' classroom attention that students receive in the FLO service (from teachers and caseworkers) are identified by students as significant and positive points of difference between MA FLO and mainstream school. Students value highly the fact that learning can be tailored to areas that they are interested in and which link to their future educational or job aspirations;
- h) MA FLO caseworkers feel that they have to spend too much time collecting and collating DECD compliance data and that this reduces the 'productive' time that they could spend with students. Examination of the compliance burden could yield more caseworker contact time for students and help prevent caseworker 'burnout';
- i) MA FLO students are typically working on different SACE/learning outcomes despite often all being located in the same teaching space. Teaching spaces are limited in FLCs, often to one main classroom and a few smaller breakout spaces. There is a heavy reliance on the FLO teacher and it is recognised by FLO coordinators, caseworkers and students that teaching resources are spread very thin and teaching space is limited. While resources are constrained, providing 'break-out' spaces in FLCs and additional teaching resources are important to ensure effective completion of work and variety in teacher/student contact; and
- j) It was suggested by some FLO students and caseworkers that young students (Year 8/9) are being sent to FLO when they may benefit more from staying in mainstream school. Younger students are perceived to be more disruptive of the learning environment, though it is also recognised by more mature FLO students they may be in the service for very good reasons such as bullying or non-attendance.

1. Introduction

1.1 This evaluation examines the extent to which Mission Australia's Flexible Learning Options (MA FLO) Program in South Australia contributes to increased wellbeing, opportunity and ambition for young people at risk of disengagement from education and society more broadly. FLO was implemented from 2007 onwards by the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) of the South Australian Government. It was designed as a social inclusion initiative to help address poor school retention rates. FLO is inspired by grassroots and 'community-based retention strategies' and aims to provide young people with an accredited program of learning (Bills and Howard 2016: 30). The learning that FLO students access can be on-site or external to their schools i.e. in dedicated co-located or off-site flexible learning centres (FLCs), at VET courses or apprenticeships. In addition, their attendance is supported by active case management that helps students to work out personal learning plans, addresses barriers to learning and re-engagement supports them to access the services they need and links them to employment opportunities or social activities. Case managers advocate on behalf of students and their role is critical to motivating FLO students to achieve attainable learning and employment goals. The casework support provided under the FLO model has been widely credited with keeping students linked to an educational experience, while at the same time helping them to address the problems, disadvantage and constraints that many of them face (Bills and Howard 2016).

1.2 Anecdotal evidence has suggested a range of positive outcomes that can be associated with FLO attendance and casework support, including increased wellbeing and reduced severity and frequency of criminal offending (Aird et al. 2014). However, South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) completion rates associated with the FLO program have been historically low, relative to non-FLO students. Bills and Howard (2016) note that in 2013 7% of FLO students had completed SACE Stage 1, with 22% having partially completed it. Stage 2 completion was 2%, with 3% partially completed. Many FLO students are also enrolled in VET courses that can contribute to SACE outcomes. In 2015 6% of FLO students completed a VET Certificate 1, 8% a Certificate 2 and 2% a Certificate 3. Historically, SACE completion has not been the driving force for the establishment of the FLO program in SA, with broader concerns for inclusion, educational, vocational and social re-engagement taking precedence over a narrow focus on SACE completion (Bills and Howard 2016). However, as the FLO Program has matured and evolved an increased concern for SACE completion has emerged. The FLO coordinators and teachers interviewed for this report all referenced a DECD preference for SACE outcomes for FLO students, but only where they are realistically attainable.¹

1.3 Poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion are recognised as driving lower levels of attainment, though the reasons why students are placed in FLO programs are varied and often relate to ongoing mental health issues, a perceived lack of relevance of SACE to future career prospects, bullying or in-school conflict and non-attendance (cf. Gonski 2011; Lamb et al. 2015). While SACE outcomes are undoubtedly important, this report focuses principally on the FLO student-casework nexus in probing the qualitative 'value added' for students that results from FLO attendance. It poses a simple yet critical question. Namely, what does success look like? A qualitative approach helps us to answer this question in two important ways. First, it allows us to move beyond simple quantitative metrics and in the process, highlight the breadth and depth of impacts that accrue to FLO students

¹ Bills and Howard (2016) provide an overview of both the origins of FLO, as well as a set of policy recommendations concerning FLO and SACE attainment in SA.

participating in the service. Second, and most importantly, it gives a voice to the FLO students, caseworkers, managers, coordinators and teaching staff who respectively attend FLCs, provide case support or teach. Consequently, a qualitative focus allows an in-depth examination of the extent to which FLO services (casework included) contribute to students':

- a) Wellbeing;
- b) Confidence;
- c) Self-efficacy;
- d) Degree of social engagement;
- e) Extent of learning engagement;
- f) Opportunity;
- g) Ambition; and
- h) Maturity.

1.4 In taking a largely qualitative approach, this report does not seek to discount quantitative data. MA-generated quantitative data speaks to many of the themes outlined above. FLO-specific quantitative data drawn from Mission Australia's Youth Survey and MA Northern FLO Program² Client Satisfaction Survey, both conducted in 2017, are used to set a broad context detailing issues such as FLO student aspirations, satisfaction with study, barriers to post-school goals, issues and concerns, as well as degree of social engagement. These data are complimented by in-depth qualitative data derived from current FLO students attending MA Flexible Learning Centres (FLC) in the Adelaide suburbs of Aldinga, Elizabeth and St. Marys, as well as in the Riverland town of Loxton.³ Data was collected from MA FLCs between the 12th September and 28th November 2017. In addition, qualitative data derived from MA caseworkers, MA managers and FLO coordinators⁴ contribute to the depth of analysis over the same period and between 29th January and 1st of March 2018. Finally, a number of student-focused events held at the MA FLCs in St. Marys and Aldinga were attended during this period for the purpose of observation.

2. Program Description

2.1 The current FLO Program of the DECD emerged from a long-held concern to address increasing retention problems within SA secondary schools, allied to the desire to promote social inclusion, as well as learning and earning opportunities beyond the strictures of mainstream SACE study (Bills and Howard 2016). In 2003 the School Retention Action Plan (SRAP) committed to fund a wide range of alternative 'community-based' educational opportunities for school age students and engaged in 41 school-retention pilot studies to test their impact. In 2005, these pilots became the Alternative Learning Options Programs (ALOPS), an activity housed within the Innovative Community Action Network (ICAN) of DECD (Bills and Howard 2016). In turn, further evaluation of the ALOPS program gave rise to the current FLO Program, which was implemented from 2007. In 2013 4,410 students were enrolled in FLO, some 7% of the total secondary cohort of 62,425.

² The MA FLO Northern Program covers the northern suburbs of Adelaide, as well as the Gawler, the Barossa Valley and wider Northern Region.

³ FLO Learning Centres (FLCs) perform multiple functions and are not uniformly referred to by that acronym. For example, the MA St. Marys learning centre is referred to as an Independent Learning Centre or ILC. For the sake of brevity all of MA's FLO centres are referred to as FLCs in this report.

⁴ FLO coordinators at MA-supported FLCs may be either DECD employees directly working for an associated school or an MA employee delivering teaching as part of MA FLO service provision provided to the school. For the sake of clarity these staff are simply referred to as FLO coordinators hereafter.

2.2 The DECD focus of the FLO program is broad and reflects the South Australian Government's desire to promote educational re-engagement and enhance social inclusion, while also building a wide range of individual life skills for young people who may be acutely vulnerable and in need of support. Thus, FLO supports a number of important outcomes beyond the attainment of formal qualifications. DECD promotes FLO as 'a way to get your learning back on track' by:

- a) Improving reading, writing and maths skills;
- b) Getting your SACE;
- c) Gaining the skills to go onto further study or to get a job;
- d) Getting relationship advice to get along better with family and friends;
- e) Solving money problems and finding housing;
- f) Making good life choices;
- g) Feeling healthy and happy;
- h) Planning for the future.⁵

2.3 DECD recognise that some young people face many significant problems that leave them unable to cope well with the formal school environment. These challenges include:

- a) Anxiety and depression
- b) Learning difficulties;
- c) Social and behavioural problems;
- d) Bullying;
- e) Homelessness;
- f) Family difficulties;
- g) Pregnancy;
- h) Drug problems.⁶

The integration of onsite casework is deemed critical to the success of the program and to helping young people address these challenges.

2.4 A range of different service providers support the FLO Program in SA through the provision of accredited learning and/or casework, including Mission Australia. The MA FLO Program - upon which this report focuses - has run in South Australia since 2007 and currently supports over 500 students across 32 different schools through MA FLCs (see Annex 1). MA's work in this space aims to enhance young people's access to, participation in and completion of a course of accredited learning through the delivery of a wide range of educational services, support services and active case management.

2.5 The core pillar of broader SA FLO programs is the provision of intensive casework to support the often-complex needs of the young people attending FLCs. In the context of the MA FLO Program, casework builds upon MA's approach to service delivery, which is 'strengths-based' and focuses on placing young people at the centre of the decision-making that affects them. MA FLO's casework approach derives from a practice-driven understanding that young people may face 'multiple and complex barriers' that affect their ability to stay in school, achieve positive learning and self-development outcomes and socially participate. MA casework support is designed to be holistic, as

⁵ <https://www.decd.sa.gov.au/supporting-students/flexible-learning-options-flo/flexible-learning-option-flo-enrolment>

⁶ <https://www.decd.sa.gov.au/supporting-students/flexible-learning-options-flo/flexible-learning-option-flo-enrolment>

well as targeted in nature, in line with the Australian Service Excellence Standards (ASES) via which MA is accredited.⁷ Through the casework approach, young people can be supported on an ongoing basis through regular weekly case management sessions and in turn, linked to multiple services in order to address problems such as drug, alcohol, mental health, housing, homelessness, bullying or family conflict issues. MA is also able to directly link FLO students to some of its in-house services including its Youth Drug and Alcohol Program for counselling support and education, as well as its Reconnect Program, which targets youth homelessness prevention. Casework in the context of FLO is extensive and covers numerous activities, often over several years of support, from initial engagement, student attendance, intervention, to exiting the FLO Program (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: MA FLO Case Management



(Mission Australia FLO Case Management 2018)

2.6 MA FLO casework underpins achievement of the DECD higher-level outcomes, which are measured via six key performance indicators (KPIs) and associated targets. All of the Approved Panel of FLO Providers must meet these KPIs, which include:

- Case management plans are developed** - Each student receiving case management services has a documented case plan;
- Contact with family and young person** - Initial contact is made within seven days of

⁷ <http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/services/community-services/australian-service-excellence-standards>

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- receiving a referral from the school;
 - c) **Attendance at weekly case management sessions** - Students attend at least 70% of scheduled sessions;
 - d) **Progress review** - At least one review of each student's engagement and learning occurs every six months;
 - e) **Accredited learning** - Each student is enrolled in an accredited learning program within six months of commencing a FLO enrolment;
 - f) **Ongoing service delivery** - Students have access to case management support and/or engagement activities during school holidays.

(See Annex 2 for more detail on the DECD KPIs)

2.7 The MA FLO Program achieves very high rates of compliance with the core DECD KPIs outlined above. A recent DECD audit of the Aldinga FLC reported 95% compliance and MA internal sampling indicates even higher compliance rates. These rates of compliance are significant, given the re-engagement challenges that many of the students who are referred to the MA FLO Program face. Supporting the DECD KPIs are the stated aims, objectives and outcomes associated with the MA FLO program and against which the data presented in this report is broadly levelled (see Annex 3 for MA FLO's Program Logic). The MA FLO Program's overall service aim and rationale are, respectively:

- a) To provide FLO Case Management and Learning Programming for young people experiencing disengagement from education to achieve their goals and aspirations; and
- b) FLO enrolments provide the platform for young people experiencing disengagement from education, to prevent early school leaving and re-engage in education, learning and work experience pathways, with the aim of achieving SACE or other Vocational Learning Outcome, and post school pathways.

2.8 The MA FLO Program's long-term goals are broad and because of this are not wholly within its influence, since their achievement is subject to a wide range of social, economic and political factors that are beyond its scope. Given this, their assessment falls outside the remit of this evaluation. Long-term outcomes include:

- a) Successful return to education;
- b) Continued engagement in education;
- c) Completion of qualifications, including SACE or TAFE;
- d) Successful transition to apprenticeship or employment; and
- e) Increased confidence to select and apply for higher-level education or training.

2.9 The MA FLO Program also identifies a number of short-term outcomes that it seeks to achieve. These short-term outcomes are more fully within the influence of the MA FLO Program delivery and more amenable to both quantitative and qualitative assessment. Consequently, this evaluation prioritises a focus on these shorter-term outcomes within subsequent analysis. Short-term outcomes include:

- a) Improved attendance, engagement and completion of learning activities;
- b) Increased participation in training courses;

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- c) Increased participation in career development activities;
 - d) Increased access to information on employment resources and support;
 - e) Increased access to information on vocational training courses;
 - f) Increased access to supports to maintain mental health and reduce other barriers to learning;
 - g) Increased access to community support structures and organizations;
 - h) Increased access to information on social opportunities;
 - i) Increased access to personal development and well-being programs;
 - j) Increased school readiness for children; and
 - k) Improved decision making, self-efficacy, emotion and behaviour management.

3. Methodological Approach

3.1 The methodology employed in undertaking this evaluation was ostensibly qualitative in its approach. Quantitative data drawn from Mission Australia's Youth Survey and MA Northern FLO Program Client Satisfaction Survey (both 2017) are also utilised in this report, but their methodologies are not described within this section as they were collected by Mission Australia researchers under the auspices of separate data collection and ethics processes.⁸ In addition to these data sets, a wide range of MA FLO program literature, MA and DECD forms and presentations were supplied for review for the purposes of contextualisation. Finally, a discrete number of non-MA secondary sources have been drawn upon to add a degree of policy and historical detail to the wider FLO story.

3.2 In keeping with the focus of this evaluation, data collection prioritised the participant groups of FLO students and FLO caseworkers. The bulk of data collection occurred between 12th September and 28th November 2017, with some follow up telephone interviews occurring between 29th January and 1st March 2018. A total of 24 FLO students attending Mission Australia FLCs at St Marys, Aldinga, Elizabeth and Loxton were interviewed. In addition, 11 FLC-located caseworkers, 2 MA FLO managers and 4 FLO coordinators were interviewed. MA caseworkers at FLCs in St. Marys, Elizabeth and Aldinga were interviewed; none were available for interview in Loxton.

3.3 MA played a significant role in sourcing interviewees, especially FLO students. Here, students were selected by FLO managers and invited to attend a focus group at their relevant FLC. Given the high prevalence of mental health and anxiety issues amongst FLO students many preferred not to participate. This means that the FLO students interviewed may have been more confident relative to others, tended to be older, were selected by MA FLO managers and many had a positive story to tell of their experience of FLO attendance. The extent to which these students were representative of the wider cohort of FLO students is a potential weakness associated with this report. However, based on discussions with caseworkers, the issues each of the students faced in terms of the stimulus that led them to the FLO service is representative of the wider cohort. Further, reticence in coming forward to be interviewed does not mean that FLO does not impact these students in the same way. The MA statistical data outlined in Section 4 below supports the assertion that the MA FLO Program has a quantifiably positive impact on the lives of the majority of students who take up the service.

⁸ See Mission Australia (2017) for details of the methodology employed in the collection of MA's 2017 Youth Survey data.

3.4 Once students had been identified for interview, their attendance at their FLC was requested and a focus group was undertaken of approximately one-hour duration in each of the 4 FLCs visited. FLO students were given a \$30 Coles voucher to thank them for their participation in the evaluation, which is standard MA research practice. Following one of the focus groups, all of the female participants gave their vouchers to a fellow student who had not been involved in the interview, a young mother who was experiencing acute financial hardship. This demonstrates the close bond many students expressed that they had formed in FLO over their shared problems and constraints.

3.5 Where possible, during the same FLC visit semi-structured interviews were conducted with caseworkers, managers and FLO coordinators if staff were available. All focus groups and semi-structured interviews were recorded, with permission of the interviewees, for subsequent transcription and analysis. The fully transcribed focus groups and semi-structured interviews were then subject to thematic analysis during which a number of clusters emerged (see Thomas and Harden 2008). These were identified through the manual coding of the qualitative data. Manual coding assigns a single word or short phrase to capture the essence of the theme. For example, the following quote taken from one of the FLO student focus groups identifies that:

... we can do what we want within reason, when we want to, and we know that we're going to have the support, no matter what it is. And it's just a very - like kind of safe - like a lot of people that come here have shit home lives. And they come here and they feel safe and they know that this is like somewhere they can do their work, or just sit down and chill out, and not have to worry about whatever they're facing at home.

There are a number of strong themes evident in this passage of data, including safety, home and conflict. Qualitative datasets coded in this manner enable researchers to: (i) gauge the commonality of the themes across different research sites, i.e. across different MA FLCs; (ii) assess the importance of the theme, i.e. frequent mentions of a theme across multiple research sites enables more robust generalisations to be made; and (iii) discard themes that are not as prominent and therefore not as generalisable. Data that can be triangulated across multiple sites or via multiple informants is regarded as more robust and representative. Only the most robust and dominant themes emerging from the thematic analysis of the qualitative data are presented within this report. Key themes include:

- a) Student pathways to MA FLO;
- b) Student enrolment and assessment;
- c) The culture of learning and the FLC as a site of safety and flexibility;
- e) Casework, caseload and caseworker support;
- f) Caseworker/student rapport and trust;
- h) FLO outcomes;
- i) FLO student motivation and ambition; and
- j) FLO as a protective asset.

3.6 All of the MA FLO students across the 4 FLCs in which data collection was conducted were interviewed utilizing the focus group methodology (see Annexes 4-7 for the participant information sheet, consent form and lists of questions employed). The FLO student focus groups were used to gain an understanding of students' experiences of attending FLCs, receiving casework support and

of what the FLO service means to them in terms of how it has positively impacted upon their lives. In turn, caseworkers, managers and coordinators were all interviewed utilizing in-depth semi-structured interviewing, except in once instance when 3 caseworkers from Elizabeth FLC were interviewed collectively in a focus group. These interviews focused on their experiences of delivering various aspects of the FLO program.

3.7 The methods used during data collection were chosen for their ease of use, simplicity and adaptability. Focus groups generate naturalistic discussion and stimulate vigorous group interactions that might not otherwise occur in one-on-one talks with individuals. They are useful in revealing collective experience and barriers to service delivery in a very frank and direct way. In keeping with the best outcomes associated with the methodology no more than eight FLO students participated in any one focus group. The conversational style of focus groups allows the facilitator to adapt questions as issues emerge, though it is important that participants are not allowed to steer the discussion too far away from the core evaluation questions (see Annex 6). Effective facilitation ensures that the group is gently brought back on track. Semi-structured interviews utilise predetermined lists of questions, that like focus groups can be adapted as the discussion proceeds and are widely employed in qualitative data gathering processes (see Annex 7).

Ethics

3.8 This evaluation was subject to Mission Australia's internal ethics process, which was undertaken by its Ethics Committee. Clearance was granted on 26th September 2017. The research process was subsequently subject to an additional DECD clearance process, which enabled the lead researcher to interview FLO students and DECD staff within DECD premises. DECD Research Application CS17/000748-1.26 was approved on the 7th November (please see Annex 8 and 9 for DECD research approval and site clearance notices). Prior to the 7th November only MA caseworkers were interviewed and only on MA premises. After this date, the rest of the informants (FLO students, FLO coordinators, DECD-employed staff) from whom data was collected, were interviewed.

Child Safety

3.9 South Australia's Children's Protection Act of 1993 mandates that organisations and individuals have a role to play in ensuring that children are kept safe and are protected. Mandatory notification is required under the Act and where abuse is suspected it is a legal requirement that it is reported to the Department for Child Protection via the Child Abuse Report Line. As part of the preparation process for undertaking data collection two mandatory short courses were undertaken, including Child Safe Environment (CSE) Training and Reporting Abuse and Neglect in Education Care (RAN-EC) Training. The trainings were supplied by Mission Australia Northern FLO Program on 14th September 2017.

Data Security

3.10 Collected data resulting from this evaluation is securely stored on University of Adelaide servers. Hardcopy data is stored in a locked cabinet. Procedures for the responsible management of data are supported by the University of Adelaide's *Research Data Management Guide*.⁹

4. FLO Students and the Wider Context: a Quantitative Assessment

4.1 The quantitative data set out in this section are drawn from Mission Australia's Youth Survey and MA Northern FLO Program Wellbeing Survey, both of which were undertaken in South Australia in 2017. These data address a wide range of issues of direct relevance to the efficacy and impact of the MA FLO services, while also helping to set the wider context for the qualitative data that is presented in Section 5. They identify strong FLO student ambition, confidence that these ambitions can be achieved, but also a host of barriers that can affect the attainment of these post-school goals. In addition, these data address student values, concerns and social activities. Overall, data highlights broad student satisfaction with MA FLO services across South Australia.

Mission Australia Youth Survey 2017: South Australia FLO data

4.2 A total of 103 FLO students in South Australia aged between 15 to 19 years of age responded to MA's national Youth Survey in 2017, including 93 attending the MA Northern FLO Program. Of these, 56 (54.9%) were female, 46 (45.1%) were male and 10.9% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. 2.9% of respondents stated that they were born overseas and 3.0% of FLO students reported speaking a language other than English at home. Key FLO-relevant themes addressed in the 2017 Youth Survey included:

- a) Respondents' plans for study and training;
- b) Confidence in achieving study/work goals after school;
- c) Barriers to post-school goals;
- d) What young people value and issues of personal concern;
- e) Where young people go for help with important issues; and
- f) Activities young people were involved in over the past year.

These key themes are systematically addressed below.

Plans for study and training

4.3 Respondents were asked about their plans for future study and training. Overall, 83.9% of students attending a FLO service stated that they intended to complete Year 12, this compares to 96.8% of the wider SA total. More male FLO students than females indicated that they were not planning to complete Year 12 (28.1% of males compared with 3.3% of females), though a much higher proportion of males than female FLO students indicated plans to take up an apprenticeship (21.7% versus 5.4%). Students were also asked whether they were currently undertaking a

⁹ <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/graduatecentre/handbook/06-conduct-research/02-management-research-data/>

vocational education and training (VET) course or if they had done so in the past. Of the FLO students surveyed, 42.9% indicated that they had previously participated or were currently participating in a VET course. When asked what they were planning to do after school, among FLO students:

- a) 39.8% planned to get a job;
- b) 15.5% planned to attend TAFE or college;
- c) 14.6% planned to go to university;
- d) 12.6% planned to undertake an apprenticeship; and
- e) 8.7% planned to travel or go on a gap year.

The data outlined above highlights that while fewer FLO students may seek to complete Year 12 (especially males), many have clear ambition in terms of future career and study goals. 60.6% of FLO students were either very satisfied or satisfied with their current studies, compared to 68.7% of the SA total.

Confidence in achieving study/work goals after school

4.4 Respondents attending FLO services were asked how confident they felt about achieving their post-school goals for study or work. Many indicated high levels of confidence in their ability to achieve the goals they had set for themselves. Overall FLO student confidence was slightly lower than that of SA respondents in total, but not markedly so.

- a) 3.7% of FLO students indicated that they were extremely confident in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school compared to 9.2% of the SA total;
- b) 23.5% indicated that they were very confident compared to 29.6% of the SA total;
- c) 44.4% were somewhat confident compared to 39.8% of the SA total;
- d) 24.7% were slightly confident compared to 17.5% of the SA total; and
- e) 3.7% were not at all confident in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school compared to 3.9% of the SA total.

Barriers to post-school goals

4.5 Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2017 also asked young people attending FLO services whether they felt there were any barriers, which may impact on the achievement of their post-school study or work goals. 57.3% of students indicated that they felt there would be barriers, with a greater proportion of females (63.0%) than males (48.6%) reporting a perceived presence of barriers. Respondents who reported the presence of barriers were asked to indicate from a number of items which barriers they saw as preventing them from achieving their goals after school. For FLO students the top three barriers identified were:

- a) Mental health (20.4%);
- b) Transport issues (14.6%); and
- c) Academic ability (12.6%).

4.6 Interestingly, a greater proportion of the wider SA total identified academic ability as a barrier to achieving their goals (20.9%). A higher proportion of total SA respondents also identified a lack of jobs as a barrier at 13.8%, compared to only 8.7% for FLO students. This suggests that the vast majority of FLO students feel that their academic ability will not constrain them in terms of entering the workforce. FLO students cited mental health as the most significant barrier to achieving post-school goals (20.4%), compared to 14.0% of total SA respondents. The extent to which mental health issues present as a challenge for the FLO system is captured in MA analysis of SA FLO data emerging from the Youth Survey. They note that:

The Youth Survey includes a measure of non-specific psychological distress, the Kessler 6 (K6). The measure is widely used and asks young people about the experience of anxiety and depressive symptoms in the last four weeks. Based on established scoring criteria, the K6 has been used to classify respondents from FLO into two groups - those with a 'probable serious mental illness' and those with 'no probable serious mental illness'. According to these criteria, 23.0% of students from FLO were classified with a 'probable serious mental illness'.

(Mission Australia 2017: 3)

These findings are supported by the qualitative data set out in Section 5 below, which details significant levels of FLO student anxiety, concerns over bullying and broader mental health issues. Mental health issues are identified by students and caseworkers as a significant driver of student enrolment into the MA FLO Program.

What young people value and issues of personal concern

4.7 The Youth Survey 2017 also asked respondents how much they valued family relationships, financial security, friendships, getting a job, physical and mental health and school or study satisfaction. Among FLO students:

- a) 63.0% ranked friendships (other than family) as either extremely or very important compared to 78.8% of the SA total;
- b) 74.5% ranked family relationships as either extremely or very important compared to 79.4% of the SA total;
- c) 57.9% ranked physical and mental health as either extremely or very important compared to 46.4% of the SA total;
- d) 55.1% ranked getting a job as either extremely or very important compared to 42.2% of the SA total
- e) 52.0% ranked school or study satisfaction as either extremely or very important compared to 69.8% of the SA total;
- f) 49.5% ranked financial security as either extremely or very important compared to 46.4% of the SA total.

These data suggest that SA FLO students are less socially connected than the wider SA cohort and are more concerned about physical and mental health issues, which links strongly to the qualitative data subsequently presented in this report. They also place greater value in getting a job and

correspondingly, value school or study satisfaction less.

4.8 Respondents were also asked to rate how concerned they had been about a number of issues in the past year. FLO students ranked coping with stress, school or study problems and body image as their main issues of concern.

- a) 35.3% were extremely or very concerned about coping with stress compared to 43.2% of the SA total;
- b) 31.6% were extremely or very concerned about depression compared to 25.8% of the SA total;
- c) 26.0% were extremely or very concerned about body image compared to 29.0% of the SA total;
- d) 25.0% were extremely or very concerned about school or study problems compared to 33.9% of the SA total; and
- e) 19.2% were extremely or very concerned about family conflict compared to 20.4% of the SA total.

These data suggest that FLO students are most concerned about mental health issues but may display higher levels of resilience in areas such as coping with stress or study problems compared to the wider SA total.

Where young people go for help with important issues

4.9 Respondents were asked to indicate from a number of sources where they would go for help with important issues in their lives. The top three sources of help for students attending FLO programs were friend/s (79.4%), parent/s (73.5%) and a relative/family friend (68.4%). Additionally, FLO students were found to be more likely to seek help from GPs/health professionals, school counsellors and community agencies than SA respondents in total. Given the wide range of personal issues that drive students to attend FLO programs, allied to the opportunity to access casework support and external services this finding is perhaps to be expected.

- a) 55.9% of FLO students indicated they would seek help from a GP/health professional compared to 42.4% of the SA total;
- b) 45.7% of FLO students would seek help from a school counsellor compared to 34.5% of the SA total;
- c) 36.2% of FLO students would seek help from a community agency compared to 11.9% for the SA total; and
- d) 15.2% of FLO students would seek help from a telephone hotline compared to 9.6% of the SA total.

Activities young people were involved in over the past year

4.10 FLO students are far less involved in a range of social and cultural activities than the SA total. This may reflect the lack of economic means, family or cultural support necessary to access and maintain youth and community activities, as well as mental health problems such as acute anxiety,

which may further constrain social activity. Such data suggests that FLO students are more socially and culturally isolated than SA respondents generally and face the risk of social disengagement and exclusion. Among FLO students:

- a) 26.5% had been involved in sport (as a participant) in the past year compared to 69.3% of the SA total;
- b) 16.3% had been involved in sport (as a spectator) compared to 61.9% of the SA total;
- c) 25.3% had been involved in volunteer work compared to 44.6% of the SA total;
- d) 12.4% had been involved in arts/cultural/music activities compared to 42.0% of the SA total;
- e) 15.3% had been involved in youth groups and clubs compared to 28.1% of the SA total;
- f) 9.2% had been involved in religious activities compared to 24.2% of the SA total; and
- g) 5.1% had been involved in student leadership activities compared to 29.9% of the SA total.

These data speak to significant levels of social disengagement amongst FLO students and represent an ongoing challenge to service providers charged with increasing social engagement and reducing levels of social exclusion.

Mission Australia Northern FLO Program Client Feedback Survey 2017

4.11 The 2017 MA Northern FLO Program Client Feedback Survey was designed to gauge levels of client satisfaction with MA FLO services in the northern region of Adelaide (which includes the Gawler and the Barossa Valley). In total, 100 FLO students completed the survey. The Client Feedback Survey speaks to some of the core DECD KPIs concerning delivery of case management in the context of FLO services. These include the development of a case management plan; the speed of contact with the family and young person following a school referral; weekly case management contact; enrolment in an accredited learning program within six months of commencement; and the provision of information concerning engagement activities. The survey found that:

- a) 93% of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of the services received from MA Northern FLO;
- b) 95% were very satisfied or satisfied with the time it takes staff to provide assistance or services;
- c) 96% were very satisfied or satisfied with staff practices respecting privacy and dignity;
- d) 94% were very satisfied or satisfied with the response of staff or management to concerns or suggestions raised by FLO students;
- e) 94% were very satisfied or satisfied with the frequency of consultation about services received or needed;
- f) 90% were very satisfied or satisfied with the information they received on scheduled events or activities, as well as changes in the service program or changes to FLO staff;
- g) 90% were very satisfied or satisfied with their access to the FLO service in terms of its opening hours and location; and
- h) 95% were very satisfied or satisfied with the respect and attention paid to customs, beliefs, cultural background and linguistic needs by FLO staff.

4.12 The quantitative data presented in this section set a broad context against which qualitative data can be set. The quantitative data highlights that FLO students face a wider range of issues than non-FLO students, are more socially isolated and at risk of exclusion, but nonetheless harbour strong ambitions for the future. In addition, students demonstrate high overall satisfaction levels with MA's FLO service and also confirm that from the student perspective, the DECD core FLO KPIs are being met.

5. 'When you feel like there's nothing, FLO's there': a Qualitative Assessment of MA FLO

5.1 Data from the qualitative focus groups and interviews are set out below according to the themes identified during the process of thematic analysis (see Section 3.6). These include: FLO student pathways; student enrolment and assessment; the FLC as a safe and flexible space; themes connected to casework, FLO outcomes, student motivation and ambition; and finally, the role FLO plays as a protective asset for young people. Where possible analysis seeks to integrate data from all participants interviewed be they FLO students, caseworkers, managers or coordinators. For the sake of anonymity, no names or location data is provided for any of the verbatim quotes utilised in this report. This in no way detracts either from the strength of the analysis or its relevance.

Student Pathways to MA FLO

5.2 Students are referred to FLO services by their schools and attend either the school's FLO service (located on or off-site) or the service of a third-party provider. Student pathways to MA FLO services are varied, though some common themes or drivers are clearly evident in the quantitative data outlined in Section 4. Students who are falling behind in their school work - for multiple reasons - are at risk of dropping out and therefore the FLO service provides a safety net for ensuring that contact is maintained between the 'at-risk' student and the education sector, while a wide range of skills, including life skills, literacy and numeracy, are progressively built through tailored learning plans. MA FLO students were quick to recognise both their own academic failings, but also the lack of adequate support within 'mainstream' school capable of addressing their issues.

5.3 Many suggested that when they didn't understand something in class or if they fell behind, this would lead them to: (i) misbehave; (ii) be excluded from class; or (iii) stop showing up for school entirely. However, often, their reasons for non-attendance or problematic behaviour related to a personal issue or problem:

... I ended up dropping out of school because the teachers just couldn't help me because I was that far behind. And if they spent all the time helping me, they wouldn't have been able to help any of the other students in the classroom. So, I just dropped out of school completely and didn't really get anything done. And then I found out about FLO through my mum's friend who works here. And I reckon I've finished more work this year, to the highest standard I ever have, in my whole entire schooling (FLO student).

5.4 Many FLO students cited a lack of access to specialist support within mainstream school as a reason for their difficulties. Anxiety and mental health issues such as depression were often identified by students as the reason driving their FLO attendance. The small number of school-based

counsellors and the extent to which they are stretched across large cohorts was also cited as a problem. Students identified that only one or two counsellors per large school (1000+ students) was simply not enough and that because of this little attention could be paid to their specific problems, as a result:

I stopped going to school because I wasn't getting help with my dyslexia, so I ended up failing Year 8, because I just stopped showing up because I couldn't get the help that I needed (FLO student).

School just wasn't working out because I wasn't getting the help I needed, I guess. I think there's just a big assumption that you're teenagers, that it's all hormones. It's just growing up. So, because of that, the people that are really struggling are just dismissed (FLO student).

In addition, many students cited a lack of understanding about the nature of their problems.

I've done basically everything by myself. I've like, organised psychiatrists and take medication and all that stuff. Or they'd [teachers] be like 'just cheer up ...' and it's like, 'yeah okay' (FLO student).

It [mainstream school] didn't have the support system for the individual, or the understanding to how young people need to cope. And just how life events can come into play and study be not only just less of a priority because, you know, life. But still the anxiety because, you know, we're pressured to continue it even though we can be going through so much (FLO student).

5.5 However, while there was a perception that school-based counselling or support was inadequate or that mainstream schools simply did not care about their problems, evidence also suggests that school counsellors were active in referring students to appropriate services (such as Headspace), as well as in organising referrals to a FLO service, liaising with FLO providers and caseworkers and in ensuring regular contact occurred between schools and FLO providers concerning student progress and wellbeing. In this respect, the course of action taken by schools in referring students to a FLO service, knowing that they can receive the tailored academic and casework support necessary to address the issues that they face, constitutes a highly appropriate course of action.

FLO Student Enrolment and Assessment

5.6 When entering the MA FLO service, a whole of life assessment is undertaken. This assesses the student's situation and circumstances, and typically is 4 or 5 pages long. Based on that exercise and the caseworkers' own assessment, a tailored learning and wellbeing plan is developed for each student. This plan identifies the forward focus of learning/earning and any existing barriers that they face to re-engagement with learning/earning. Such plans are discussed with the relevant school funding the student's attendance at the MA FLO service. Though an important process, caseworkers were critical of the amount of intake paperwork and felt that ongoing DECD compliance work reduced the amount of productive time that caseworkers could actively spend

supporting FLO students. They were quick to recognise however that the learning and wellbeing aspects of the assessment are essential.

5.7 Ideally, students should come to the FLO service with DECD documentation outlining their challenges (described by caseworkers as the 'DECD Matrix'). This is a brief assessment:

It is a snapshot. Pretty broad. It might state three things ... diagnosed disability, unstable accommodation, not living at home. With young people their circumstances can be dynamic; challenges can change and are fluid (FLO caseworker).

While some caseworkers cited excellent relationships with school FLO coordinators, counsellors and teaching staff more broadly, verbal communication seemed to be more reliable and valued than written 'intake' documentation, which was often not provided:

Some schools are good at giving - like on the referral forms where it says 'comments' - like almost all the schools don't pay attention to that. But some might put something, you know, brief, little something in there which is really helpful. But some of them will give you a call and say like you know, 'this is what's going on for this young person'. But for the most part it's kind of like a figure-it-out-yourself sort of thing. Like, probably 15%, 20% maybe have good information with them (FLO coordinator)

5.8 There was a suggestion that the lack of school documentation means that too many questions have to be asked of FLO students during their initial enrolment and that this can be received in a negative way:

... you have to pelt all these questions at them, so you can figure out where to help them and then some of them really shut down and don't want to be a part of it. So, like 'oh no, it's too much' or 'this is too painful to go through again' (FLO caseworker).

Better school referral notes and background on individual FLO students may help to reduce the burden on caseworkers in terms of them having to find out everything about a new student from scratch. Further, higher quality referral processes may help to drive better and higher quality student engagement, re-engagement and participation, which in turn may lead to higher quality outcomes for FLO students. Caseworkers feel that the volume of information that they have to glean from FLO students is very significant in the first month following their referral to the service by a school. Because of this - and knowing that students are reticent about repeating their personal stories - they tend to proceed with a high degree of caution knowing that it is essential to build rapport and trust with their clients. Caseworkers identified that without rapport and trust little headway could be made:

The assessment process is big, I often won't do that immediately or that will have them running out the door. I often do that lightly, come in, build rapport, find out where they are at and their interests, strengths, likes, dislikes ... maybe touch on peer relationships, friendships ... I don't dive in too hard. No one will open up until they trust you. Without rapport nothing will happen (FLO caseworker).

5.9 Despite the cautious approach of caseworkers, many FLO students are highly conscious of the number of times that they have had to repeat their 'stories'. Students who have been in the service for longer periods of time and may have transitioned through several different caseworkers, external support services or different FLO services were critical of the fact they had to repeat their stories, despite the fact that copious case notes already existed on their situation:

... there had been a couple of people [from a previous non-MA FLO provider] where they didn't bother about reading the information in the folder and they wanted me to explain the whole thing again. And I was like 'no, I'm not doing that again' (FLO student).

While this criticism is valid, caseworkers need to build rapport and trust, which is only achieved through ongoing dialogue. Nonetheless, better referral and referencing of case notes could help to reduce the informational burden on FLO students during intake, which is a time of significant stress and anxiety for them as they transition to a new learning environment.

5.10 As part of enrolment in FLO all students are required to develop a Flexible Learning and Transition Plan (FLTP) that targets the type of learning they require relative to their abilities and what they want to achieve. Students valued the fact that MA FLO can tailor learning to areas that they are interested in and which linked to future career aspirations. While many students aspire to complete SACE, others did not, due to their chosen career paths:

You meet your case manager, more about connecting with them, figuring out what you need to complete, so if that's your PLP for year 10, or literacy and numeracy for year 11 or research project for year 12. So it's more they figure out what you haven't done in mainstream school and then you do that. And then once that's completed, they'll get you into a course to get more SACE points to complete your schooling (FLO student).

Cause I'm not working towards SACE or anything, I work in hospitality, I'm a chef. And it gave me the opportunity to do the Cert III to become qualified. And I would've never been able to afford it on my own (FLO student).

5.11 The individuality of FLTPs and the one-on-one classroom attention that students receive in the FLO service (from teachers and caseworkers) is identified as a significant point of difference between FLO and mainstream school. Tailoring means that students are put on a pathway that is relevant not only to their ambitions and their ability, but also their wellbeing. It was recognised by students that the flexible and tailored study format associated with FLO, allied to smaller class size and one-on-one attention had resulted in big personal changes and an opportunity to learn, attain and progress that had not been available in mainstream school:

I used to never be able to do my work, I used to suck at maths and never be able to go anywhere. But now I'll actually sit there and get stuff done (FLO student).

Yeah, I used to like never be able to go to school. And now it's like only two days a week. It helps. Like, I've done so much more in like, doing it two days a week compared to five days a week. I've done so much more (FLO student).

I'm the polar opposite to three years ago. I'm so addicted to work now (FLO student).

Such sentiment, as expressed by FLO students, suggests that they feel a qualitative change in their abilities and enthusiasm levels resulting from FLO attendance. This is reflected in the quantitative data set out above and subsequent qualitative analysis below that demonstrates a parallel increase in confidence and wellbeing.

The MA FLC: Culture of Learning, Site of Safety and Flexibility

5.12 MA FLCs may be organised quite differently depending on the needs of the schools with which MA partners. They may be internal to the school, external to the school but with school delivery of teaching, or they may be offsite with teaching provided by an external supplier. The MA FLCs focused upon in this report reflect that variation. However, close coordination and regular (preferably daily) communication between school FLO coordinators, teachers and caseworkers was cited as substantially strengthening FLO delivery and creating a learning and support space that contributed significantly to the re-engagement of students in learning and society more broadly.

5.13 Caseworkers noted that it takes a while to build up the culture of an FLC into a space that is non-threatening and respectful. Some suggested that while they strive for this goal, this has not always occurred and that inevitably some groups have their own cliques. The high achievers (physically and academically) tend to dominate things just like in a normal school, but caseworkers and FLO coordinators are sensitive to this and seek to address it. Caseworkers note that the more informal nature of FLO, like having no school uniform, letting them go outside and have a smoke if they want to, go to the kitchen to get food or go to a chill-out space, allows students to step out of situations more easily and thus regulate behaviour, as well as enabling them to interact easily with caseworkers. It was noted that there is zero tolerance for bullying or harassment, which is critical given that many of the FLO students cited bullying as a driving factor for their attendance at a FLO service (see Section 5.15 below).

5.14 Many FLO students, it was suggested, attend the service because they have learning problems. In addition, FLO students can attend from Year 8 onwards, so a broad range of in-class support has to be offered in order to fully cater for all. Many FLO students are working on different SACE/learning outcomes and are on different points of learning pathways, despite being located within the same 'class'. Where the FLO service is growing, this places considerable strain on the available teaching resources. There is an extremely heavy reliance on FLO teachers and it is recognised by coordinators, caseworkers and students that teaching resources are often spread very thin. Students at one of MA's FLCs noted that:

... there's not enough [teacher] to go around. Because ... these people are doing English, these people doing research, these people doing maths – then yeah, she could float around group to group. But we've got ten different people doing ten different TAFE courses, five people doing their English, two doing their maths, two doing something else (FLO student).

Obtaining additional teaching resources could have a significant impact on curriculum development and also give FLO students more teacher variety. In addition, it was noted that there were few resources available to support excursions for students, but that these could help enhance FLO students' sense of social inclusion and opportunity. Typically, teaching spaces are limited in FLCs, often to one main classroom and a few smaller breakout spaces.

5.15 Mental health issues were commonly cited as a 'push factor' driving students to the FLO program, as was bullying. FLCs are perceived as a safe space by FLO students because they give them the flexibility and support necessary to address the issues that they face in a manner that is deemed to be less stressful than mainstream school. Many of the students noted that FLO had been a haven from the chronic bullying that they had experienced in mainstream school. Equally, FLO coordinators noted that benefits are also felt by parents, it being suggested that once their children are in the FLO service parents 'visibly relax':

Well, I dropped out in year 10, and I started work then all this stuff happened and then I dropped out, and I don't think I would've done anything besides just sat at home on Centrelink, to be honest. So, it kind of helped me get my confidence back up, helped with my depression, and just put me in the right path without them demanding things. They just opened up my eyes to see where I wanted to go in life (FLO student).

... growing up being bullied and stuff like that, because I felt so alone, and it went through primary school, and then I started high school - it just got worse and worse. And like, whole - it was just constant, every single day of year 8 and year 9. And I think in year 9 I started rebelling against everyone because I was so emotionally drained by being bullied and all that. So, I kind of started rebelling against teachers and stuff. And then in year 10, I tried to get back on track but the bullying kept happening. And because it was three years of bullying, teachers got sick of me coming into the office crying and going to the counsellors. I was never in class because I was scared of being bullied in class. I was scared ... of mainstream and I still am in a way. I go there for dance, like, two days a week. But even then, I can't sit in a classroom full of people, I have to sit in my own area and do my work and stuff like that. And, because when I was 12 I got diagnosed with depression and anxiety and then like, a year ago, I ended up getting another anxiety, which is social anxiety. So, I've got two anxieties. And with my social anxiety it's really bad - can't go shopping or anything like that. And being at FLO - I started this year at the start of this year - I heard about it, I can't remember who from, but my mum said it was the best idea that has ever come up and I should definitely take the opportunity. And I did, and it has helped me a lot and it's made me more comfortable with everything. And it's less stressful; it's more of a calm environment (FLO student).

5.16 The feeling of safety that FLO can instil in students also allows them to 'open up' to their caseworkers, to start to address the problems that they face and to re-engage with learning or forge a pathway to earning, as well as to re-imagine what 'success' looks like. The safe space of FLO in effect allows students to start achieving when no achievement was practically possible before:

I was just being bullied because of how big I was then. Then, after that I just got into too many fights so they asked me to leave. Then I went back a bit because they let me, then I dropped out. Then I moved down here to see my dad. So, I couldn't handle main, so then main school let me come here for a bit and I liked it. So, I've just been coming here from now on then. And from this I've got Cert II certificate in construction; got my white card, got my first aid. So yeah, it's really helped me a lot in life (FLO student).

I feel more open, I guess, because in mainstream it's like when you're asked a question everyone will judge. But in here, people don't judge. In a way, they just, if you ask for help no one will think it's weird or anything like that (FLO student).

5.17 In addition to feelings of safety instilled by FLO attendance, the recognition that most FLO students are in the service for reasons connected to bullying, anxiety, depression or other significant issues in a way creates a common bond between them and makes them potentially more respectful of each other. It was suggested that:

... they're [FLO students] not as ignorant as the majority of people in high schools, because they're exposed to what's going on with the minority. We're all exposed to the things that happen at home or the dark paths that people go down. I feel comfortable knowing that, you know, I might talk about my past and someone's not going to go 'oh, you're a dropkick' because they're reasonably exposed to it (FLO student).

... like it's so much less judgemental here. So, people don't talk about you here. Like, they just, they come here, do their school and they go home (FLO student).

5.18 Few behavioural or conflict related issues were noted by informants, though some FLO students noted that there were some in the service who were 'wasting time' or had got on to FLO just to pursue vocational interests and had no real problems at mainstream school. There was a perception that these students are somehow not in as much need and are somehow 'gaming' the system. However, this also suggests that mainstream school does not cater especially well for students who wish to enter vocational training with an aim to ultimately gaining employment. It is clear that some students see FLO as a mechanism for helping them to achieve their specific career/training goals. This was recognised by the FLO students interviewed, but also tempered by a caution not to jump to conclusions over students' individual circumstances:

... it's there to help you for someone who actually needs help not for the like, just dropkick people who want it. Because FLO actually gives you so much more than what school does. Like, it gives you opportunities to go and like do courses to go on with your life. Like, they just force their way in just so they can get free trades and whatever (FLO student).

... the people that come here, everyone has their own learning, like their own plan, their own everything, their own case managers and stuff, and I think, like, it is hard when you first start coming here. I still remember what it was like, and I remember feeling really awkward, like I couldn't do anything and really like closed in because I was so used to something completely different to this. So it does take a long time to blend in to it. But I also think, you know, that I don't think it's a good idea to come here as an excuse not to do schooling. Because this is a program for people that want to get their lives, like want to have ambition and want to get a career and want to – and I know that it takes a little bit for you to get comfortable and get into your thing. But the other kids out there - I'm sure they're working with their case managers on getting stuff sorted out (FLO student).

5.19 Student concerns were occasionally echoed by caseworkers, who were sometimes critical of the students being sent to their FLCs. It was noted that young Year 8/9 students are being sent to FLO when they may benefit more from staying in mainstream school, though it is also recognised

that students often come for very good reasons such as bullying or non-attendance. It was noted in one MA FLC that the entry of younger students into FLO had led to disruptions in the shared classroom and a feeling amongst older FLO students that this cohort were disrupting their studies. In turn, this speaks to the restricted teaching spaces available to FLCs and their relative inability to separate cohorts:

... FLO is doing students a disservice by taking them on too young. We need students to stay in mainstream for as long as they possibly can because the quality of the education is better, it is more demanding. Here we've got one teacher that floats around to groups of students and teaches in a more self-directed manner, but the content is not as heavy (FLO caseworker).

5.20 Despite concerns that FLO may be perceived as a repository for difficult students, caseworkers feel that the supportive and flexible structure of FLO nonetheless contributes significantly to these students' prospects:

It was not the intention of ... FLO to be a dumping ground for difficult students. We try to stay away from that, but I think there is the temptation for that to be the case. If they are playing up at the main school, then they are not getting their education anyway. They are being sent out of class and affecting other people, so it is an ethical dilemma. Sometimes we can get the results they can't because they have 30 students to deal with. Whereas we have a case manager working alongside a teacher (FLO caseworker).

Such concerns aside, the FLC space is clearly valued as a space for personal growth and change. It is a space that is defined as being safe and though there are perceptions that some students are undeserving of being there or are too young, the MA FLO students interviewed recognised that they did a lot of growing up in the FLCs with the support of their caseworkers and teachers. The students interviewed were quick to acknowledge that perceived time-wasters may have been not so different from themselves when they initially entered the service.

5.21 Given that students perceived FLCs to be a safe space from the issues that affect them, it is perhaps unsurprising that they feel less stressed in the FLO environment than they did in mainstream school. They suggest that FLO has the space and flexibility for them to literally 'step out' if they feel pressured or if events in their lives are impacting them in a negative way. Unlike school this flexibility is important to students being able to 'step-out' and either calm down or seek help from a caseworker:

But it's more than mainstream like when I first came here, I had a lot of problems going on in my life. And there was times when I just needed to get up and I just needed to go and take a breather. And that's one thing - one of the things - I love about FLO is that they understand, they get it; they understand that things happen in life and that you do need to take a breather sometimes. Unlike mainstream. If you got up in the classroom and left, you would have like, detention or something the next day (FLO student).

5.22 Flexibility in the context of FLO links closely to student perceptions of independence. FLO students like the independence that they feel when attending the FLCs, with many feeling it reflects where they are in their own lives. Many of the students interviewed have been in FLO for several

years, live independently and/or have children. The flexibility that FLO offers such students therefore articulates well with the additional responsibilities that these young people have:

Well, the whole independent side of it, we can work at our own pace, is like, what I like the most about it. Because I can get all my SACE points done and, you know, finish my year 12 and go on to do TAFE courses and stuff. That's what I like the most about it (FLO student).

I like FLO mainly for the fact that being a young mum it still gives me the opportunity to complete my schooling, and later on in life I can use that to get a job so I can still have a career, and focus on my son at the same time. I can bring him [the child] here so I can still do my schooling while looking after him, where mainstream schooling if you have a child, once you reach the age of 17 they kick you out of school up here. So, a lot of the young mums don't get the opportunity to complete their schooling (FLO student).

5.23 By its very nature FLO is a flexible learning environment that can be 'dropped into' or out of depending on the personal circumstances and tailored learning plan of each student. As a learning space, FLCs with their smaller class sizes and more one-on-one attention also helps to stimulate personal changes in the FLO student that result in positive outcomes. For example, most students suggested that despite the flexibility associated with FLO, the classroom is very well ordered, and the teachers were relatively strict in their approach, especially where behaviour was concerned:

... he's [teacher] like, really strict on swearing. Like I know it's not the nicest thing, but like, come on – most of the people here come from pretty 'derro' places. But he said that the main reason he does it is because if you get a job you're not allowed to swear in some workspaces. So that was his meaning behind it, so I get where he's coming from (FLO student).

You should've seen how ... I was at the start of FLO. I would talk so loud I could literally be heard from the other side of the building. And you should've seen me in the classroom - I was that one that tried to make everyone laugh and just kept talking and disrupting everyone. But now I can talk quieter and I get everything that I set out for that day done (FLO student).

5.24 Such sentiment does not mean that FLCs are without problems of a behavioural nature. Some students noted that the occasionally students will 'act up', or 'bring in their family problems', or attempt to distract others in the classroom. When disruption affects other students FLO teachers/coordinators and caseworkers may decide a period of exclusion or work outside the classroom may be a suitable option.

Yeah, if you're doing something to like threaten someone else, or if you're doing something that's completely wrong, they'll ask you to leave. If someone's safety is at risk. Generally, it will only be for like a couple of days or a week or depending on what the case is. But if it happens continuously then the person will be told to leave and not come back, they'll be like expelled (FLO student).

Again, the safe, flexibility and alternate structure of FLO means that potential conflicts can be quickly addressed by caseworkers and FLO coordinators working together to ensure that there is minimum disruption to the FLC.

Casework, Case Load and Caseworker Support

5.25 The role of the MA FLO caseworkers is to assess what the best strategies are to encourage the FLO student to participate and engage in a learning, earning or wellbeing pathway. This can include participation and engagement in flexible learning, case management sessions to address barriers, organised training or other accredited learning. It was noted that FLO student literacy, language and numeracy skills can be quite poor and that a lot have trouble reading and writing. Other significant barriers include low confidence, self-esteem, mental health issues, and substance abuse. The caseworkers' goal is to address the most acute barriers, then address some of the less critical barriers faced over time. The overall aim of casework is to foster re-engagement with learning and society more broadly.

5.26 Caseworkers suggest that FLO is important because it offers students the opportunity to be 'counted', to succeed at an activity and not be 'forgotten'. Further, the community-based focus of FLO means that local service providers, such as schools and community-based organisations are empowered to work with local students to effect positive changes. The schools, FLCs and wider community takes ownership to ensure that local students are valued, have a voice and get on a successful pathway. However, there was also a perception amongst the FLO coordinators interviewed that FLO was changing and becoming much more results driven. It was suggested that there is a stronger focus on SACE, though other certified learning, as well as wellbeing remain core concerns for DECD. In light of concerns over the low attainment rates for SACE amongst FLO students it was noted that the FLO curriculum has been strengthened since 2013 with a far greater focus on SACE, literacy and numeracy being introduced (Bills and Howard 2016). It was noted that the FLO model allows teachers to be creative around the SACE modules that students take and that the service has shifted from being 'a bit of a hang-out centre' for failing students to a proper learning environment.

5.27 The combination of effective casework support and a strengthened curriculum was regarded as having significant impacts for students. It was suggested that FLCs take a 'positive psychology' approach to students entering the service and that they take young people with many different 'problems' and from very different backgrounds and slowly build their confidence through a more supportive learning environment and a tailored personal learning plan (PLP). This, it was argued, 'helps to set the tone for ambition and progress'. It was suggested that FLO services 'give the kids hope about the future' and that they come into the service entrenched in a certain mindset, for example that unemployment is the norm and their own or family's Centrelink payment is 'pay day'. FLO, it was argued, helps a little to 'break that cycle' and offers a safer environment in which students can 'mature'. MA's Youth Survey data (see Section 4) supports the validity of these observations concerning FLO students' ambitions beyond school.

5.28 While it was recognised that some students are looking for a way out of mainstream school just for the sake of it, most FLO students were there for sound reasons. It was noted that the FLC

won't take Year8/9 students without a very good reason. It was suggested that it is the flexibility of the FLO service that helps students to re-engage with learning. However, some FLO students have such acute problems, like extreme social anxiety, that they do not attend any learning but still receive the valuable case worker support designed to enhance their wellbeing, whilst therefore working toward engaging in learning. Other students, it was noted, may be in the FLO service but not attending the FLC as they are enrolled in VET courses or apprenticeships. In keeping with the educational goals for young Australians set out in the Melbourne Declaration (2008) and by DECD, such FLO students can be regarded as being on a pathway that builds career ready productive citizens.

5.29 Nonetheless, some students do not thrive in FLO, for a variety of reasons, and these students are reviewed after 6 months (students are always under a form of review through case management). If inadequate progress is made or students can no longer be financially supported by the school (i.e. over 21 years of age) then the student will be exited to existing labour market programs and other training schemes, such as Transition to Work and Job Active. Even if students have ongoing wellbeing issues they have to be exited, as students can't be compelled to take the casework support that is offered, even if it is in their own interests. However, they may be referred to alternative wellbeing focused services.

5.30 Each caseworker carries a maximum load of 25 cases/clients, if a full-time employee. Opinions on whether this load was sustainable and offered the best possibility for support were varied. Many caseworkers said that the load was manageable; others mentioned that it was just manageable or sometimes too heavy.

... the job is really broad and it's really big and I think, yeah, I just think that it's a lot of things to expect someone to be able to do in a short period of time with so many people. Like, I think – because sometimes like I say, a lessened caseload would be helpful but other times it wouldn't really matter. But I just think that having to deal with all the educational side of things, and the – all the vocational, all employment, all that kind of stuff – that's a job in itself just kind of dealing with all of that and figuring out a pathway for them. But then you've got their whole wellbeing which is just enormous, and sometimes trying to help them deal with that means that this just gets put to the side or dealing with this means that this isn't dealt with (FLO caseworker).

Caseload links closely to the funding model for a FLO provider. Mainstream schools are funded per student and these resources can be applied to a FLO student to support tuition, the provision of external services and training, as well as the casework component.

5.31 The complexity of some cases can often mean that single clients can absorb a lot of caseworker time and while this doesn't mean that others suffer as a result, caseworkers recognise that due to the size of their jobs they have to manage their load. This sometimes means that students who are travelling well, who are turning up, engaging and have no pressing problems may get less attention. Nonetheless, weekly contact appeared to always be maintained. In some instances, caseworkers are pulled into the classroom to offer additional support to students and some voiced hesitant concerns that caseworkers are not qualified teachers.

5.32 Caseworkers generally felt well supported by their managers and appreciated their efforts and knowledge. Some voiced concerns that management was spread thin across numerous sites and that in some instances caseworkers felt they shouldn't bother managers as they knew they were heavily burdened. Complex cases and the large workload is a cause of stress for caseworkers, and many noted that they have to look after their own wellbeing. MA FLO was deemed to be good at addressing staff wellbeing issues. Many identified that they do not work outside of normal work hours if at all possible and are conscious that if they do, they can easily 'burn out' given the nature of their employment.

Caseworker/Student Rapport and Trust

5.33 The cautious assessment process of new FLO students undertaken by caseworkers helps to build rapport and trust. Caseworkers understand that building rapport and trust is critical to their relationship with FLO students and the extent to which they will be able to help them. The building of rapport is a process that typically occurs over a period of 3-4 weeks, when the caseworker has to learn as much about a student as possible in order to best help them. Many FLO students are initially hostile to the assessment process, hence a cautious approach to 'getting to know each other' is critical.

I was very hostile towards coming here. For the first year of being with Mission, I did not want a bar of it... (FLO student).

However, the building of trust is a slow and organic process, and this is reflected in the feedback of FLO students, most of whom are appreciative of the time that caseworkers invest in them.

But I first- because of everything I went through before I came here, I didn't feel comfortable enough talking to case manager about sort of my problems and my issues, sort of thing. But I think they kind of just, they start to warm up. I think when I first came it took about maybe about four weeks before I opened up (FLO student).

... she's definitely like a lot more helpful and understanding. She doesn't just see you as like you're a person on a piece of paper. She actually sees you as like, a person with feelings and things that are going on and she tries her hardest to, you know, understand. And I've told her about my problems with anxiety and maybe social anxiety in particular. And you know, she's just been absolutely wonderful with like, making sure I'm comfortable but not make a scene about it, make it very discreet and stuff and just try and like, help me the best that she can (FLO student).

5.34 Caseworkers are a critical point of first contact for FLO students and the problems that they encounter. MA FLO students valued the support of their caseworkers above all other services that they have accessed, despite many of them having referrals to different wellbeing focused services. Students were often very critical of the quality of service providers outside of MA FLO, especially mental health service providers:

They're [services] there to help you but they literally do nothing. I went to [a service provider] for a little while and it felt really condescending. I don't know the word for it, but they're just like kind of aggressive with what they're talking about (FLO student).

Others, were less critical, especially where services were connected to material wellbeing like housing services or health services unrelated to mental health:

Yeah, I was kicked out of home and now I'm living independently in a homeless accommodation house. I came here during the school holidays and they were actually just like 'oh we'll go into Baptist care and we'll sort it out and you'll be in a new home at the end of the week' (FLO Student).

5.35 Despite some concerns over the value of external service providers, most FLO students valued the lengths that caseworkers went to in order to try and help them address the issues they faced. MA works to embed 'restorative practice' in its service and casework delivery model. Restorative practice seeks to repair relationships that have been damaged, for example as a result of bullying or domestic violence. By helping the affected parties recognise the harmful outcomes associated with certain behaviours restorative practice helps to promote restorative action on the part of the offender and forgiveness by the victim.¹⁰ With regard to how caseworkers promote restorative practice one FLO student noted that:

... because they work with youth, they can then ring them, and we can get direct referrals to things and it's just - but also, they don't just try and fix the problem themselves. Like, they'll go 'ok if it's this problem we'll go across to the police station together and talk about it'. And they don't just blow your problems off - no matter what it is they'll come up with a way (FLO student).

5.36 Some of the FLO students, especially those that had been in the service for a long period of time (such as young women who have had children), noted that sometimes they just didn't hit it off with a caseworker and requested a change. While MA FLO seeks to align the most appropriate caseworker for a client, the caseworker data collected identifies that this is not always possible due to staff leaving, staff movements between FLO centres or the balancing of casework load between caseworkers:

Yeah, and it is hard because like, sometimes you get given a case manager that you don't connect with, and that you like don't want to tell anything to. But sometimes you're not given the option to get a new case manager or change to someone you feel more comfortable. But they don't take it offensively if you say, 'look I'm really sorry ..., but I don't feel like we're clicking'; she'll say 'that's no worries; I'll find you someone you feel comfortable with'. It's not like they go 'oh, well we don't want to help you because you don't like me' (FLO student).

Students noted a degree of anxiety when shifting to a new caseworker, especially when they have a built a close bond with their previous caseworker:

¹⁰ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/methodrestorative.aspx>

... she's like the only person I've like gotten along with, because I have really bad trust issues. And now that she's leaving I'm like 'how am I going to go now? ... She's helped me throughout heaps of stuff (FLO student).

5.37 While a cautious approach to building rapport and trust is important, frequency and proximity of casework support is also critical to the wellbeing of FLO students. Frequency of contact between caseworker and student is a key DECD KPI, with weekly contact being the expectation. Equally, the proximity of that support is important. The co-location of MA FLO caseworkers with the FLO teachers enhances the ability of students to concentrate on or simply cope with the learning requirements. Further, knowing that caseworkers were simultaneously working on the issues they were experiencing, such as housing problems, appeared to reduce the psychological burden for some students:

I think it makes getting your work done a bit easier. Because if you're in a shit mood and you're trying to get your work done, it's just like, I can't concentrate at all. But then like, if you're in a shit mood and you go and talk to one of your case managers, you can come back and concentrate because you feel better (FLO student).

... even if your mood changes slightly, if you've got that connection with your case manager they can tell straight away. And they sort of like, bring you into one of these rooms – so it's not in front of everyone and you don't feel embarrassed. And you don't have to answer them, but they do check up on you. And that's good because, you know, anything could happen, and you could be feeling so down and not tell anyone because- and sometimes you don't feel like just, telling them. Sometimes you like to be asked to sort of like, if it's ok to explain my situation. And here, with the case managers they're absolutely amazing towards those sorts of things (FLO student).

5.38 Many of the students identified when a caseworker had 'gone the extra mile' to help them solve the issues they face. Examples of this included turning up at their house to check in on them, continually calling them until they can talk with them, taking them to a service, or a doctor and so on:

... the case managers and [FLO coordinator] rang doctors for them, helped book appointments for them, went with them to things, just so - it doesn't have to be - it could be anything that doesn't have anything to do with this schooling. But they're here for our wellbeing as well. And so any problems we have - anything we have (FLO student).

I've had – there's been a time where I've kind of just disappeared for three weeks – didn't answer my phone or anything like that. And, they actually came over to my house. Now, they legally can do that, and I didn't- it was probably good that they did because I was in a really bad time in my life. But they actually came over to my house to check up on me. And I think for that point in time I just needed that, to realise that someone was actually there for me. And I appreciate – it's good that they do that (FLO student).

FLO Outcomes: What does Success Look Like?

5.39 The question of what FLO success looks like is broad, i.e. if it is not education or training, then work readiness constitutes a positive outcome or enhanced wellbeing or simply basic social re-engagement, i.e. leaving the home and attending a service. MA FLO supports the enhancement of life skills, including career counselling for enhanced work readiness. Making students work ready may involve helping them to get a resume together, preparing them to link with job agencies or in some instances linking them directly to jobs. Attaining such life skills can be regarded as critical to a students' successful transition from school to sustained work. In addition to a focus on work readiness, wellbeing enhancement can be regarded as a fundamental priority for caseworkers. In this respect, success in the context of FLO has implications far beyond simple SACE attainment:

Success looks very different for each individual client. Sometimes it is hard to give evidence of success for a young person. Just coming in the front door might be a massive achievement (FLO caseworker).

I'm here to change people's lives for the better. Sometimes that includes SACE, but often it doesn't. I would much rather see someone set up with better self-esteem, skills they can use to survive, you know people skills, communication, confidence, all that sort of stuff (FLO caseworker).

5.40 From the caseworker perspective success is very much measured in terms of student engagement, whether it is in SACE-focused education, training or employment. The key outcome for FLO students is to make a successful transition from school to adult life. That may include SACE, though caseworks are mandated first and foremost to assess what is achievable for each individual student and then work towards that outcome. For example, MA FLO has supported students with young children to work on a community garden and socially connect through the local community centre. Many FLO students can't go to school because they have childcare responsibilities, but such programs help to build a stronger sense of social inclusion and also better parenting. In this sense, the contribution to life skills development can be significant. Positive changes to wellbeing constitute a positive outcome in the context of FLO.

5.41 Nonetheless, caseworkers, FLO teachers/coordinators and FLO managers all noted a renewed focus or pressure from schools for student engagement with and/or completion of SACE. It was suggested by caseworkers that ideally schools would have all of the students complete SACE, but they know this is not attainable by many. Nonetheless MA FLCs will endeavour to keep students on a SACE pathway if practically possible:

So, they kind of just say 'okay we want you to figure out what is best going to suit this kid'. And the school would prefer us to get most of them doing some SACE work and at least like, while we're deciding what do with this young person we'll try and get them doing something, like PLP or something like that ... when we're trying to find like, if they do want to do, like, a vocational pathway or something like that; or go into a trade – it's – that can kind of help but at least you know the school's happy because they are doing some sort of SACE; or if they get into TAFE we say 'okay, let's not shut the SACE doorway because actually what you're gonna do at TAFE can get you SACE points as well' and they all go 'oh that's amazing, awesome, cool' kind of thing. So, like if you don't go back to SACE, cool, but let's

not shut the door. And then the school's happy with that and the kids usually are as well (FLO coordinator).

5.42 Importantly, the partnering schools recognise that obtaining SACE may be a lesser priority for some students, especially in the short term. Students who fail to attend mainstream school, or who have significant issues affecting their attendance are unlikely to complete SACE regardless. In these instances, the schools and MA FLO identify shorter-term outcomes as being highly beneficial to longer-term re-engagement:

... for the most part the schools understand what the students can do and then they do want what's best for the student. So even though they're under pressure for SACE results, they're not one-eyed with SACE; they still want what's best for the young person. And sometimes we'll get young people referred to us and the mandate will be 'just get them engaging – they haven't engaged for six months, get them here'. And they're not really fussed on what they're doing to a certain extent here, as long as they're participating in learning. That's the goal, to get them engaging. Once they've done that, then because we'll refer it every six months as a minimum, okay they've been engaging for this past six months, now we want to do this or that or something like that. So sometimes it's just get them here and get them engaging regularly and work on their wellbeing or something like that (FLO coordinator).

... you're looking at students that are not necessarily going to be a high percentage of SACE achievers regardless of what we do, but we're still achieving positive outcomes by getting them into work or another accredited learning or some sort of apprenticeship. So that's the issue that I guess we face with FLO and how it's deemed to be successful (FLO coordinator).

5.43 FLO students are required to be enrolled in accredited learning with a view to them ultimately obtaining SACE, VET or transitioning to paid employment. The quantitative and qualitative evidence presented in this report indicates that attendance at MA FLO fosters students' motivation and personal ambitions. These often translated to a strong outcome in the sense of completion of a course, certificate of attainment or employment. In addition, the more vocational nature of tuition was identified by many students as being more relevant to their future lives and career aspirations:

I was like, when the counsellor at my mainstream school, she said the only subjects that they do here are English, maths, SACE ... and self-directed community learning. And in mainstream school they just have all these bullshit subjects just to fill the time (FLO student).

5.44 Caseworkers and FLO coordinators always support FLO students' ambitions to work towards a career or other non-SACE outcome if it is the most appropriate and achievable thing for the student to pursue. Often these outcomes are practical and vocational:

I think mostly, it's getting them - yeah, I would say most of them would be getting them into a vocational pathway. So like hairdressing, or something like that, or getting them their white card so that they can you know, work on a site somewhere if they want to. We've got some doing like school-based apprenticeships and stuff like that (FLO coordinator).

Several students noted that they had found work experience in an area that they were interested in pursuing for a career e.g. panel beating or veterinary assistant. Others were already working in part-time jobs gaining valuable experience, and this experience, combined with new found ambition, resulted in forming ideas concerning future careers:

I want to get into hairdressing, so this like, type of schooling helps me do TAFE courses that help me get like, some sort of degree to go straight into hairdressing and stuff. It wasn't my original career, but from coming here I discovered that I enjoyed hairdressing more than I wanted to become an RN (FLO student).

Well, the career that I'm going for now is electrician. And then eventually, I'm going to get into that and then eventually down the line I want to do something, a course in physics. Because I've got a real big interest in physics (FLO student).

FLO Student Motivation and Ambition

5.45 Many of the FLO students noted that attending an MA FLC had increased their sense of motivation. From being lost in mainstream school, to having the support of a caseworker and learning via a targeted individual learning plan, many suggested that these two facets of the MA FLO Program were transformative.

I just feel like FLO is really supportive whether you're doing really bad or really good. And it like, definitely made me more motivated. I don't know, when I was in mainstream it was just really confusing, and I didn't know what I was doing (FLO student).

5.46 The MA quantitative data highlighted that FLO students have substantial study and career ambitions and want to achieve something with their lives (see Section 4). A key purpose of the MA FLO Program is to support them to do this very thing. Students note that attendance at FLO has helped them to discover their ambitions and put in place strategies to achieve them. Most of the students stated a forward-looking goal that they wanted to attain, and this was strongly linked by them to their attendance at MA FLO. Many cited their goal to either complete SACE, go to TAFE, go to University or get a job. Despite many students identifying completion of SACE as a key ambition, several noted that they felt it was difficult to understand 'how you get the points' and that schools could do more to help students understand how to attain it:

... in mainstream, you don't really get asked what you want to do. Like, they just give you set subjects and you have to pass them otherwise you fail. And like here, like they cater to what you want your future to look like. And it brings positivity because then you don't feel like you have nothing to look forward to once you finish school because here they're trying to make sure that when you do leave school you have somewhere to go (FLO student).

... before I came to the FLO program I had, like, no goals in life. And then, I've got them now, I want to do things. So that's what it's done for me (FLO student).

I find I'm a little more ambitious. And I know the steps I can take to achieve my goals. And you know, I'm not shit-scared of going to school every day now (FLO student).

5.47 In some instances, SACE was identified as critical to future life-chances, especially in the rural locations in which FLO is provided:

Because around here, to get a job, they want your year 12 certificate. They want to know if you've passed. If they don't personally know your family, and they can't personally ask your family, then if you don't have a year 12 certificate – if you don't have a year 12 certificate or you don't have a family that has the right last name around here, you're not going to get a job. Unless you're in high school, then you'll get a job, like after school hours. But say you're like, don't do school and you're looking for a full-time job, they want that year 12 certificate, and your SACE book. They want to know that you've completed it. If you don't have it, you'll never get a job (FLO student).

FLO as a Protective Asset

5.48 Many of the FLO students interviewed acknowledged that attendance at the service had been critical to their immediate and ongoing wellbeing. In many ways, FLO services, such as those provided by MA, with the casework support that they offer, act as a form of critical social protection for young and vulnerable people who struggle to fit in within mainstream education due to the numerous issues and constraints that they face, such as those outlined above connected to bullying or mental health issues. Students noted that:

When you feel like there's nothing, FLO's there (FLO student).

I used to ask to go on FLO because I would struggle so much in school and she was like 'oh nah, only the people who really need it go on it'. As soon as I got on it we've both gone 'this is the best thing that's happened to me'. Like, I don't know where I'd be if I wasn't on FLO now (FLO student).

5.49 Several students suggested some stark outcomes if they had been unable to attend FLO. When asked what difference FLO had made to their lives, their answers - in several instances - indicated the powerful role that FLO and casework can play in social protection. For example, in terms of protection from the threat of self-harm, substance abuse, suicide, crime and bullying, to name but a few core themes identified in this report. In this respect FLO students noted that:

I went off the rails pretty bad because, you know, I was in my own world - I didn't have school, I didn't have employment, I didn't have, you know, real life stuff. It was just my world. It was kind of - so if I didn't have that [FLO], I'd be dead or in jail (FLO student).

It is hard. Before I came here I was suffering with severe depression and I was sort of in the suicidal area. And FLO actually helped me overcome that. But if I didn't have FLO, I don't think – as sad as it sounds, and I'm not trying to be everyone 'oh, poor me' – I don't actually think I'd be here right now (FLO student).

5.50 Students found it hard to imagine where they would be today without FLO and many suggested that just having someone to talk to, to trust and something to feel a part of had had a significant impact on their lives:

It [FLO] made me feel more wanted in life, and that's just what I needed because I didn't feel like I was wanted, and my family and all that sort of stuff. But when I came here they gave me like sort of, set little jobs and that made me feel wanted and I was like 'yes, I'm going to come here every day because people want me here (FLO student).

At a broader level, simple attendance at the service was often cited as being transformative for the young people attending. In this respect students noted that:

I came to FLO at like, my lowest, and they've basically brought me up to be at my highest where I've ever been. And they've helped me basically see who I really am (FLO student).

I'd be living off Centrelink for the rest of my life, I think we all would be (FLO student).

Because no one ever encouraged you, no one, at the high school no one encouraged you to do what you want to do. Because you're just a number there. You're just like a number in a classroom and it doesn't matter if you pass. And when you leave school, when you actually leave the high school you feel like 'well they all told me I was shit anyway, so what's the point?' (FLO student).

5.51 Exposure to alternative learning structures and casework support in the context of FLO appears to have a significant impact on the students' levels of confidence, self-organisation and self-reliance. In turn these contribute to the overall protective function of the MA FLO Program:

I'm definitely more confident in what I do, and you know, just getting my social skills up and just organise and time schedule – I was really bad at time before I came here. But yeah, I just think it made me more - more mature. Because now I know what I want to do with my life and I know how to get there. So, I've kind of like, grown up and set my goals (FLO student).

Going back maybe three or four years ago, I wouldn't, I had really bad anxiety. And I still do now. But, ... my case manager has, you know, she's not aggressively but kind of pushed me to make phone calls that I need to make or go to meetings that I need to go to. I used to – my first certificate that I got through her I – there was a few times I would turn up at the door and have a panic attack and not be able to go in there. But she reassured me that, you know, compared to three months ago I'm doing so much better now. And it was the constant reassurance that I am getting somewhere, and that it's not going to hurt to face my fears (FLO student).

5.52 Finally, when asked to identify the single most important thing about attending a FLO service the overwhelming response concerned the valued added by case management and the caseworker. As one FLO student put it:

Case managers are golden (FLO student).

Such feedback highlights the MA FLO Program to be a critical protective asset for young people who would otherwise be at risk of educational failure or worse, harm, during their transition to adulthood.

6. Conclusion

6.1 This evaluation has strived to give a voice to the students, caseworkers, coordinators, teachers and managers of the MA FLO Program. Their voices tell a story of a service that is helping young people to attain personal life and learning outcomes and attributes that might not otherwise be achievable within mainstream schooling. MA FLO students point to the frequency, proximity, availability and effectiveness of the casework support provided as being significant to the personal transformations that many go through while attending the service. MA FLO is a safe, non-discriminatory space in which vulnerable young people can grow, mature and re-engage with learning or earning strategies. The ability of MA FLO to tailor learning/earning or wellbeing support is critical to ongoing building of life skills, self-reliance and confidence within FLO students. MA FLO is a transformative experience for vulnerable young people. It constitutes a crucial protective asset within the broader social protection and inclusion support fostered by the Government of South Australia. The qualitative, as well as quantitative, data presented in this evaluation highlight that success in the context of MA FLO is multifaceted. The personal attributes, values, life skills, ambitions and motivation identified by FLO students within this report speak to the broad impacts MA FLO helps to foster. The key program implementation and impact findings and recommendations associated with this evaluation are presented in the Executive Summary and are not duplicated here.

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Annex 1: MA FLCs and ILCs in South Australia

| Mission Australia Site | Address | Contact person (for access to students and schools) |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Northern Adelaide | | |
| Elizabeth | Elizabeth TAFE, Building G21 & G22, Woodford Road, Elizabeth SA 5112 | Robyn Johnson, Program Manager T: 08-8283 6100 M: 0409 778 128 |
| Southern Adelaide | | |
| Aldinga FLC | Unit 3, 89 Rowley Road, Aldinga Beach SA 5173 | Stephen Fowler, Program Manager T: 08-8187 0700 M: 0477 321 324 |
| Christies Beach | 1/122 Beach Road, Christies Beach SA 5165 | Stephen Fowler, Program Manager T: 08-8187 0700 M: 0477 321 324 |
| Seaford ILC | 2/53 Cliff Avenue, Port Noarlunga SA 5167 | Stephen Fowler, Program Manager T: 08-8187 0700 M: 0477 321 324 |
| St Marys | 1219 South Road, St Marys SA 5042 | Stephen Fowler, Program Manager T: 08-8187 0700 M: 0477 321 324 |
| Riverland | | |
| Berri | 5 William Street, Berri SA 5343 | Aimee Smith, Program Manager T: 08-8583 3200 M: 0409 818 041 |
| Loxton | 13B Drabsch Street, Loxton SA 5333 | Aimee Smith, Program Manager T: 08-8583 3200 M: 0409 818 041 |

Annex 2: Key Performance Indicators for the Members of Approved Panel of Providers Delivering Case Management Services

| KPI | Target | Explanatory Note | Minimal Requirements | Additional Desirable Requirements |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| Case management plans are developed | Each student receiving case management services has a documented case plan. | A guide for an appropriate case plan is available at DECD website. | <input type="checkbox"/> Case management plan on file <input type="checkbox"/> Needs assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Development of actions and strategies <input type="checkbox"/> Transition plan (as relevant) | <input type="checkbox"/> Engagement matrix <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of review of case plan <input type="checkbox"/> Transition plan |
| Contact with family and young person | Initial contact is made within seven days of receiving a referral from the school. | Evidence of the date when the student was first referred to the provider and when the first contact was made with the student and/or their family. | <input type="checkbox"/> Case note of date of referral <input type="checkbox"/> Case note of contact made with the student within 7 days of referral | <input type="checkbox"/> FLO Referral form <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of contact such as phone call, detailed note of the meeting or letter sent <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence that the first appointment is being arranged with the student or family |
| Attendance at weekly case management sessions | Students attend at least 70% of scheduled sessions. | The case management sessions should be face to face & exceptions agreed with the school must be documented. | <input type="checkbox"/> Detailed case note describing the form and content of contact with the student | <input type="checkbox"/> Next appointment booked at the case management session <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of attendance reported to school |
| Progress review | At least one review of each student's engagement and learning occurs every six months. | The review is expected to be completed by the case manager. | <input type="checkbox"/> Case notes reflect the progress review with the school at least twice a year | <input type="checkbox"/> Signed progress reviews <input type="checkbox"/> Documented review indicating that progress review was done jointly with school |
| Accredited learning | Each student is enrolled in an accredited learning program within six months of commencing a FLO enrolment. | Evidence of enrolment in a subject aligned to the Australian Curriculum or SACE subject or a module of Certificate I or above or any pre-requisite vocational course, including such things as driver training or First Aid or White Card. | <input type="checkbox"/> Case notes noting that the student is enrolled in school subjects at school <input type="checkbox"/> Approved expenditure request form for a learning program <input type="checkbox"/> Invoice from learning program course provider | <input type="checkbox"/> Email from school confirming that the student is enrolled in school subjects <input type="checkbox"/> Confirmation of enrolment from a course provider in the form of email or a formal enrolment letter <input type="checkbox"/> Time table showing learning program/subjects/courses the student is enrolled in |
| Ongoing service delivery | Students have access to case management support and/or engagement activities during school holidays. | Documented interaction with students informing them about availability of case management support and engagement activities during holiday time. | <input type="checkbox"/> Case notes indicate that the information has been provided to the student <input type="checkbox"/> Brochures or standard letters sent to students | <input type="checkbox"/> Personalised programs and case management support offered to individual or small group of students to meet their needs |

Annex 3: Mission Australia FLO Program Logic

SERVICE AIM: To provide Flexible Learning Options (FLO) Case Management and Learning Programming for young people experiencing disengagement from education to achieve their goals and aspirations. FLO Case Management services are available to young people in a range of regions including Northern, Southern & Western metropolitan Adelaide and regional South Australia (Berri, Clare, Elizabeth, Flinders Park, Gawler, Mount Barker, Murray Bridge, Noarlunga, Port Lincoln, Port Pirie and Whyalla)

OBJECTIVES

- Increase the opportunities for students to re-engage with their learning and therefore to participate in the economic and social life of the community, building young people's capabilities and connecting them with community networks
- Increase attendance, improving behaviour and increasing overall engagement in accredited and non-accredited learning programs (including numeracy and literacy)
- Increase the connection between young people, schools and families
- Support disengaged young people into learning or earning pathways through holistic case management that places the young person at the centre
- Work with young people to address their barriers to learning by provide appropriate links to their community
- Address the barriers to learning for young people. Mission Australia's Youth Survey in 2015 revealed that stress, school and body image are key concerns to young people
- Provide effective means of re-engagement and building social inclusion

INPUTS

- Staff:**
- Area Manager & Program Manager
 - Case Managers
 - Volunteer/s (Youth Work and Social Work students on placement)
- In-kind resources:**
- Cars to support young people to attend programs or appointments
 - Mobile phones and computers, wireless laptops (to ensure Outreach to engage disconnected young people)
 - Highly trained Case Managers and flexibility to support young people out-of-hours. All staff are trained in:
 - ↳ Minimum Cert 4 in Youth Work, Coaching Young People for Success (CYPFS); Child Safe Environments; Reporting Abuse and Neglect – Education Care (RAN-EC); Risk Assessment and Interventions; Cultural Awareness and competency training; Case Management, case notes training; Suicide Awareness training. Other specialisms across Drug & Alcohol, Mental Health, Homelessness intervention and Career guidance and support
 - MA Support Services including:
 - ↳ Career Counselling & Employment; Drug & Alcohol Services; Mental Health Youth Work & Programs; Skills for Education and Employment; Juvenile Justice Services, Accredited and Non-Accredited Training, Youth Homelessness, Family Intervention, Case Management services from 23 sites across metropolitan, regional and rural South Australia

ACTIVITIES

- Strengths based and evidence based best practice programs
- Early intervention/programs developing independent living skills and well being
- Addressing barriers to learning, tailored intervention
- Working through FLTP document
- Individual career pathway planning
- SACE 'earn or learn' pathways tied to EDS1 and National Skills Training Package.
- Accessing complimentary courses (white card, health and safety etc)
- RISE program (literacy and numeracy program including life skills) held across 4 locations: Elizabeth FLC, Modbury, Elizabeth and Riverland
- Life Skills and Career Development training and intervention
- Mentoring and peer support
- Referral to appropriate specialist agencies
- Liaise with primary and secondary school principals and FLO coordinators
- Liaise with apprenticeship brokers; liaise with non-government and government agencies
- Work readiness training; arranging work experience
- Fostering links between communities, schools, councils and other agencies
- Strong partnerships with Kornar Winmil Yunti (KWY) to ensure safe, transparent and coordinated pathways for ATSI young people that build a strong sense of cultural identity, pride, respect and belonging
- Coordinated referral to specialist and/or intensive case management programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People (eg. Whitelion, AFSS, Workabout Centre, Tauondi, ABED)

SERVICE RATIONALE: Flexible Learning Option (FLO) enrolments provide the platform for young people experiencing disengagement from education, to prevent early school leaving and re-engage in education, learning and work experience pathways, with the aim of achieving SACE or other Vocational Learning Outcome, and post school pathways.

EXPERIENCE AND OUTCOMES

The changes and benefits that result from Mission Australia's FLO Case Management and Learning Programs

Mission Australia's (MA) History and FLO Experience:

- MA has delivered successful intensive FLO Case Management programs in South Australia since 2005
- MA's approach is built on putting the young person at the centre of service engagement, utilising a strengths-based approach
- In a recent survey conducted with 28 Schools, 90% reported high levels of satisfaction with MA's FLO services
- In 2015, MA delivered FLO to 584 SA students (65 of these students identified as ATSI), working with 32 schools
- MA draws on its National Case Management Approach to deliver services
- MA has experience working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through our existing services to 36 schools across metropolitan Adelaide and regional SA
- Approximately 8% of MA's FLO students are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) background
- MA has representation on the Adelaide Primary Health Network (APHN HPG) for Aboriginal Health

Short Term Outcomes:

- Young person has improved attendance, engagement and completion with learning and educational activities
- Young person has improved attendance and engagement with educational activities
- Young person participating in training courses
- Young person participates in career development activities
- Young person has access to information on employment resources and support
- Young person has access to information on vocational training courses
- Young person has received collaborative services and support to maintain their mental health and other barriers to learning
- Young person has access to information, been referred and advocated to community supports and activities
- Young person has access to information on possible social opportunities
- Young person has had access to personal development and wellbeing programs
- Increased school readiness for young children
- Improved ability to make decisions, self-manage emotions and behaviour

Longer Term Outcomes:

- Young person continues to engage in education at high school
- Young person completes educational goals, including completion of SACE or vocational accreditation
- Students successfully return to mainstream education, developing effective coping strategies and building independence
- Achievement of high quality education through involvement in accredited and non-accredited programming
- Young person has developed a resume and has participated in job search activities, and transitions confidently into post school pathways (further learning, Apprenticeships or employment) with continued support to enable retention
- Young person has increased confidence to select and apply to attend vocational training or foundation studies at University level (as per above)
- Research from **Mission Australia's National Youth Survey** is used to develop and review its service offerings to young people with a view to incorporating the voices of young people into service provision. This aligns with best-practice in FLO (the Survey is the nation's largest online gauge of the views of teenagers aged 15 to 19 years)
- Good practice activity captured through FLO reporting to schools, school and Mission Australia form partnerships to ensure FLO students optimise their learning outcomes.

Annex 4: Participant Information Sheet

Invitation to participate

The University of Adelaide is conducting an independent evaluation of Mission Australia's Flexible Learning Options Program. We would like you to take part in the evaluation because we believe it is important. The information collected will be used to help Mission Australia better understand what they have achieved so far and also make improvements to the way they offer their services. Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, we need to be sure that you understand:

1. Why we are doing it, and
2. What it would involve if you agree.

Taking part is voluntary

You are free to discuss whether to take part in the evaluation with your family, friends or your case manager. You do not have to make a decision right away.

1. You don't have to take part if you don't want to - it will not affect the service you get;
2. If you decide to take part you can stop at any time and any information you have provided will not be used.

What we want to find out

Mission Australia's Flexible Learning Options (FLO) Program supports young people to achieve educational outcomes in a non-school setting. The program also provides support services and case management. We are conducting an evaluation in order to help Mission Australia to understand the effectiveness of its FLO program. We want to find out:

1. How you benefit from the service;
2. What you think could be done better?
3. What you think is done well?

How will we do this?

The evaluation will be conducted between **September 2017 and January 2018**. If you agree to become involved we would like you to take part in a group discussion and follow-up interview.

What will happen to the information collected?

All information is **confidential** and you will **not** be named in any reports.

You can receive the results of this study by contacting Andrew Skuse Tel: 8313 4285 or andrew.skuse@adelaide.edu.au. Also, you can speak to your case manager if you have any concerns or want to know more.

If you have concerns

If you have concerns about the evaluation or are unsure about anything and need to talk to somebody other than the researcher you can:

1. Talk to your case manager or the centre manager;
2. Contact Adam Sherwood, Area Manager, Mission Australia, Tel: 8256 4600, Email: sherwoodad@missionaustralia.com.au

Annex 5: Consent Form

I _____ consent to my involvement in the research project explained above.

1. I have read the information sheet, and I understand the reasons for this study. The research worker has explained the ways in which it will affect me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. My consent is given voluntarily.
2. I understand that the purpose of this research project is to improve the delivery of the Flexible Learning Option (FLO) Program.
3. The details of the research project have been explained to me, including:
 - > - The number of interviews and/or focus groups that I will be asked to participate in.
4. I have been given the opportunity to have a support person present while the project was explained to me.
 - >
5. My identity will be kept confidential, and nothing will be published which could possibly reveal my identity.
 - >
6. My involvement in the study will not affect my relationship with Mission Australia. I understand that I am able to leave the study at any stage without having to give a reason, and that leaving it will not affect my access to services in the future.

SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** ___ / ___ / ___

INVESTIGATOR _____ **DATE** ___ / ___ / ___

Annex 6: FLO Evaluation Focus Group Questions (Students)

Introduce the rationale for the evaluation and the facilitator:

1. Interested in understanding young people's experience of the FLO Program, what it does for them, any concerns they have and what could be done better;
 2. Introduction to the researcher.
 3. Collect basic biographical data on age and gender of interviewee:
-
-
-
-

Questions

4. What do you think of the FLO service?
5. How is it helping you? What skills have you developed by attending the FLO service?
6. How have your case managers helped you? Can you give any examples?
7. What do you think of your caseworker? How helpful are they? Probe examples.
8. Do you have a mentor or get support from a peer? Probe support beyond caseworkers.
9. Do you feel that the FLO service is giving you opportunities you wouldn't have had at school? If so, what are they? Probe the learning/earning issues.
10. Do you get enough information about opportunities/learning/employment/services? What format does this information come in?
11. What outcome/achievement do you want to work towards by attending the FLO program? SACE, VET, etc. Where do you want your FLO work to take you?
12. Have you made good friends/connections through FLO? What does this mean for you?
13. How has attending the FLO program affected your life outside of when you attend? Has it given you more confidence, changed how you think about yourself or others, given you new hopes or ambitions?
14. Has FLO enabled you to access personal development and wellbeing programs? If so, what are they?
15. Do you feel more a part of the community than you did before?
16. What don't you like about the FLO service? Courses? The space? The approach?
17. What could be done better?
18. If there's one thing you'd like to communicate to Mission Australia about the service what would it be?
19. What are your main concerns or the main problems you can identify with the FLO service? What don't you like?
20. What are the best three things about the FLO service? What are the things you like?

Annex 7: FLO Evaluation Focus Group/Individual Interview Questions (caseworkers and managers, for external stakeholders modify questions for as necessary)

Introduce the rationale for the evaluation and the facilitator:

1. Interested in understanding young people's experience of the FLO Program, what it does for them, any concerns they have and what could be done better;
 2. Introduction to the researcher.
 3. Collect basic biographical data on age and gender of interviewee:
-
-
-

Questions

1. How does FLO increase opportunities for students to re-engage with learning?
2. How many FLO students in this facility are working on accredited and non-accredited learning programs (ratio)?
3. How does FLO increase the connection between young people and opportunities for re-engagement and social inclusion?
4. What are the different learning or earning pathways associated with FLO?
5. What are young people's barriers to learning that you typically encounter?
6. Are there any early intervention programs that are implemented to keep young people in school before they come to the FLO service?
7. What skills does FLO build beyond literacy and numeracy?
8. What career development skills are built?
9. What does work ready training mean in the context of FLO?
10. How are careers planned for with FLO students?
11. Do you liaise with apprenticeship brokers?
12. Have you developed any partnerships with ATSI support organizations?
13. How does mentoring and peer support work to enhance the capacity of FLO students?
14. What support, information or referrals do you provide for FLO students? Probe examples.
15. What kinds of information (social opportunities, employment, learning, training courses, mental health, health) do you provide FLO students and in what format?
16. How do you increase access to community support organisations? What strategies?
17. Can you give examples of how you enable FLO students to access to personal development and wellbeing programs?
18. How does FLO attendance increase school readiness for young people? Do you have many students that go back to formal schooling after attending FLO (ratio)?
19. How does attendance at FLO improve decision-making and self-efficacy for students?
20. What are the main barriers that you perceive to you being able to perform your role most effectively?
21. What constraints can you identify that are affecting the delivery of the FLO service?
22. What are the best three things about the FLO service in terms of impact?

Annex 8: DECD Research Clearance



Government of South Australia
Department for Education and
Child Development

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DECD CS/17/000748-1.26

Professor Andrew Skuse
Department of Anthropology and Development Studies
University of Adelaide
North Terrace
ADELAIDE SA 5005

Dear Professor Skuse

Your research project "*Evaluation of Mission Australia's Flexible Learning Options (FLO) Program*" has been reviewed by a senior officer within our department.

I am pleased to advise you that your application has been approved, subject to the following conditions:

- That a copy of any final reports, presentations or manuscripts accepted for publication be submitted to the DECD.ResearchUnit@sa.gov.au mailbox 30 days prior to their publication.
- That DECD is notified when findings are to be released to other government or non-government agencies.

Please contact Betty Curzons in the Business Intelligence Unit for any other matters you may wish to discuss regarding your application (Tel. (08) 8226 0809 or email: DECD.ResearchUnit@sa.gov.au).

I wish you well with your research.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Temperly'.

Ben Temperly
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

7 November 2017

Annex 9: DECD Site Clearance



Government of South Australia

Department for Education and
Child Development

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DECD CS/17/000748-1.26

RESEARCHER: Professor Andrew Skuse

RESEARCH BODY: University of Adelaide

Dear Principal/Director/Site Manager

The research project titled "*Evaluation of Mission Australia's Flexible Learning Options (FLO) Program*" has been reviewed centrally and granted approval for access to Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) sites. However, the researcher will still need your agreement to proceed with this research at your site.

The Researchers whose names appear below are the only persons permitted to conduct research on your site:

| Name | Clearance Type | Expiry Date |
|------------------------|--|-------------|
| Professor Andrew Skuse | DCSI Child Related Employment Screening | 27/11/2018 |

Please contact Betty Curzons in the Business Intelligence Unit for any other matters you may wish to discuss regarding your participation (Tel. (08) 8226 0809 or email: DECD.ResearchUnit@sa.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Temperly'.

Ben Temperly
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

7 November 2017