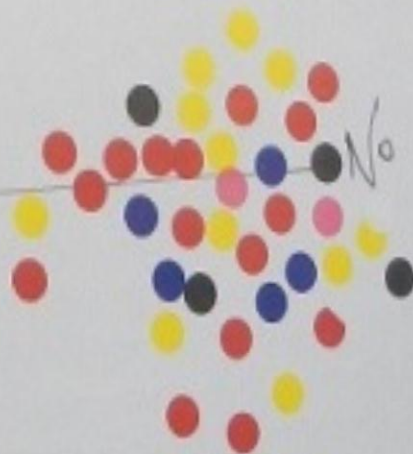# Supporting staff in flexible learning programs

Dr Vicky Plows, Research Fellow
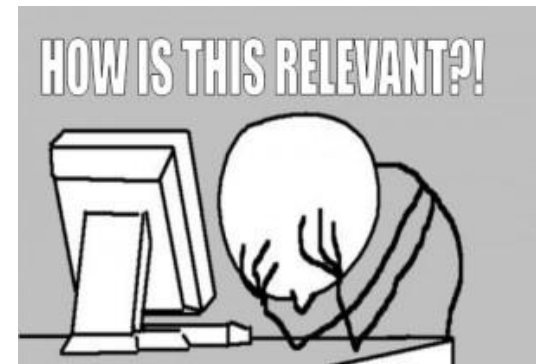**Flexible Learning Forum – Making a Difference**
Ballarat – 11 Dec 2015

PL for staff in FLPs matters…

- High quality educators are the greatest asset of FLPs (and indeed all schools!)

- FLPs require educators to work differently to traditional approaches adopted in many mainstream settings, and taught in many pre-service qualifications

- PL is a major lever for enhancing staff quality in schools and assisting staff to become more successful in their work with students

- Research on effective PL suggests it should be:

  - primarily school-based and school managed;

  - collaborative and participatory;

  - sustained over time;

  - coherent with site / organisation vision;

  - offer relevant content knowledge; and

  - promote critical reflection on staff practices and impact on student outcomes

HOW IS THIS RELEVANT?!

- Only limited research exists on PL for staff in FLPs

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE Building Better Learning

Investigating **professional learning** (PL) opportunities for staff in **flexible learning programs** (FLPs) at **secondary school** level in **Victoria**

1) What PL **opportunities** exist in Victoria to support staff in FLPs to work in socially inclusive ways?

2) How well are these PL opportunities **working**?

3) How can this PL provision be **enhanced**?

4) How do these PL experiences **compare** to the experiences of teachers and leaders in 'conventional' secondary schools?

Funding and support from the Victoria University Central Research Grants Scheme & Industry Partners:
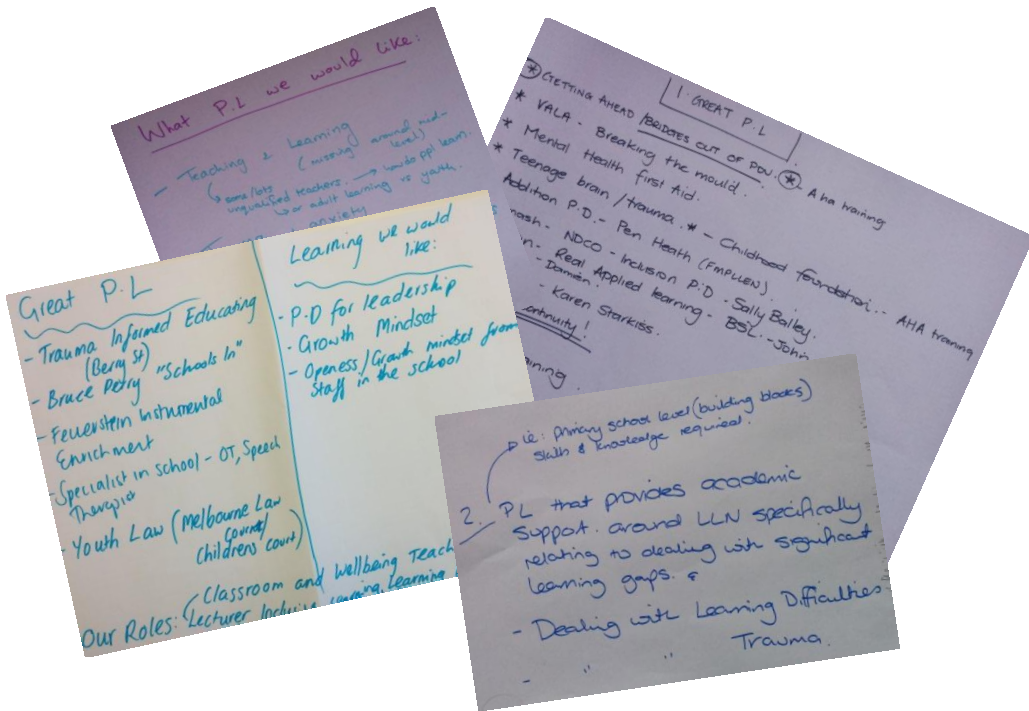- SEDA, MCM / SKYS, Oakwood School, VALA

Research team:
- Vicky Plows, Kitty te Riele, & Karen Rosauer

The project
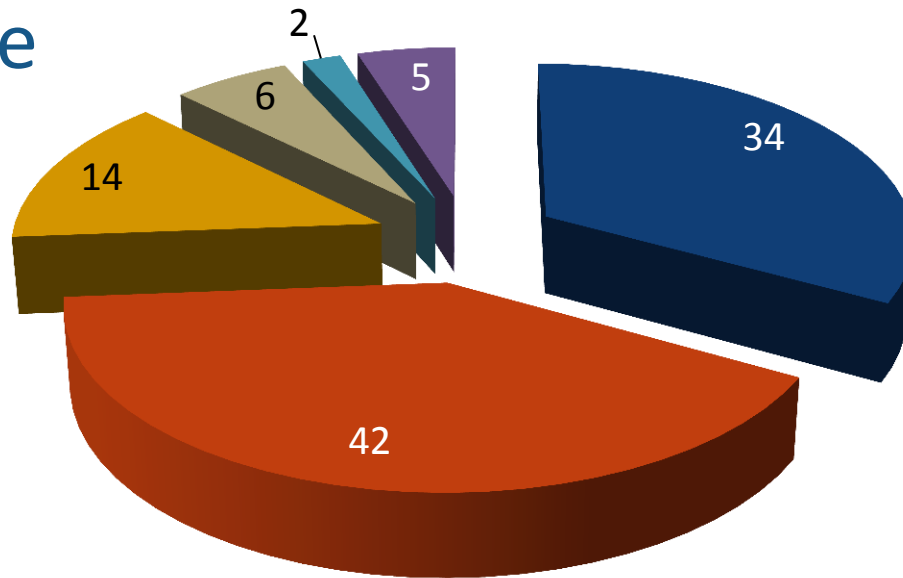
- **Survey** with staff in FLPs across Victoria
- **Interviews** with staff in 4 partner organisations
- **Searching** for PL opportunities in Victoria for an on-line directory

Survey respondents & role

103 total responses

Role

- Classroom teacher
- Principal / Leader / Coordinator
- Wellbeing Staff
- Classroom / Education support staff
- Careers & Pathways
- Front desk staff

Professional Learning – What have you undertaken in the last 12 months and what do you need more of?
Welfare, Behaviour & Engagement
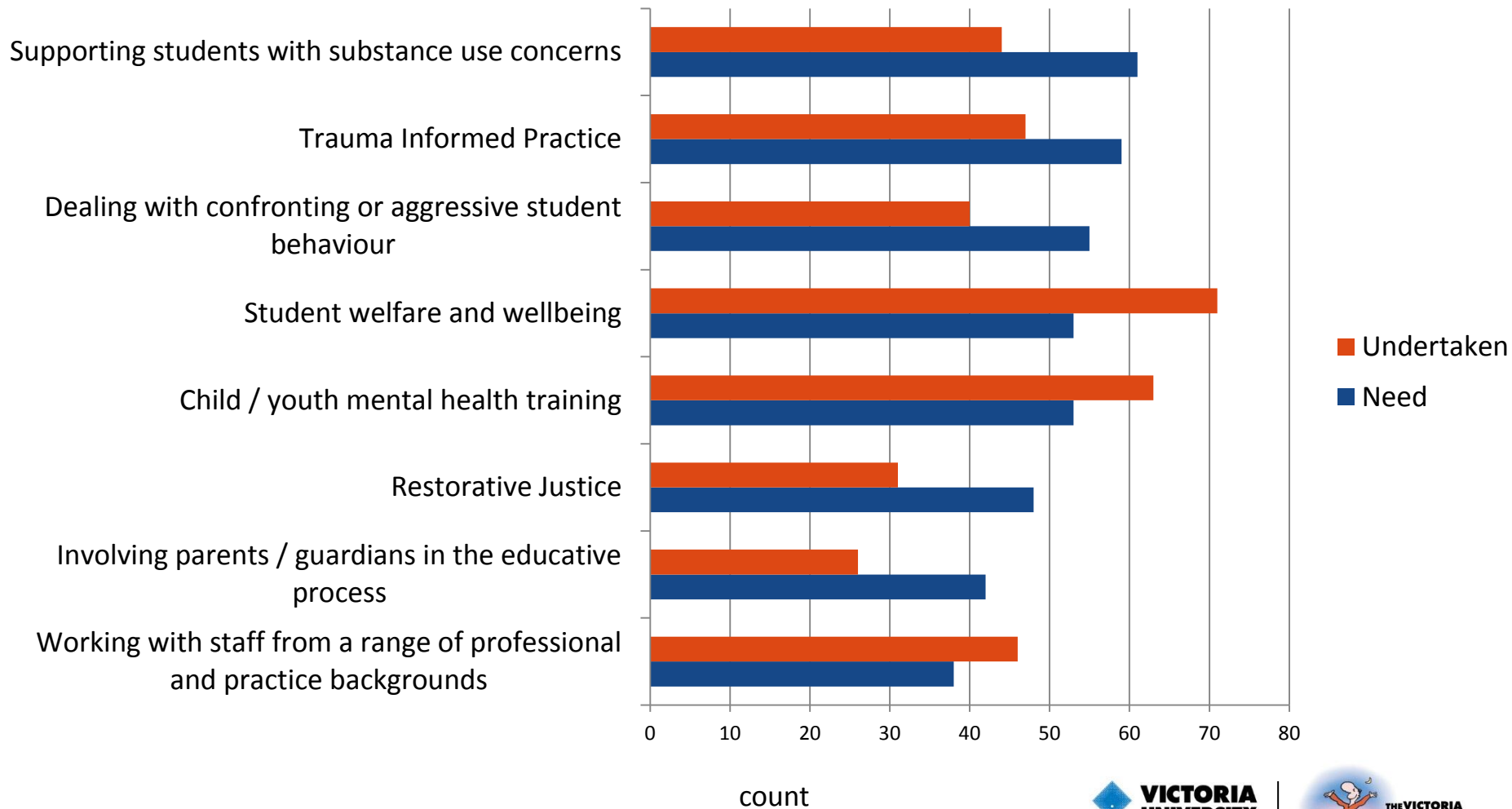
Professional Learning – What have you undertaken in the last 12 months and what do you need more of?
Student Diversity
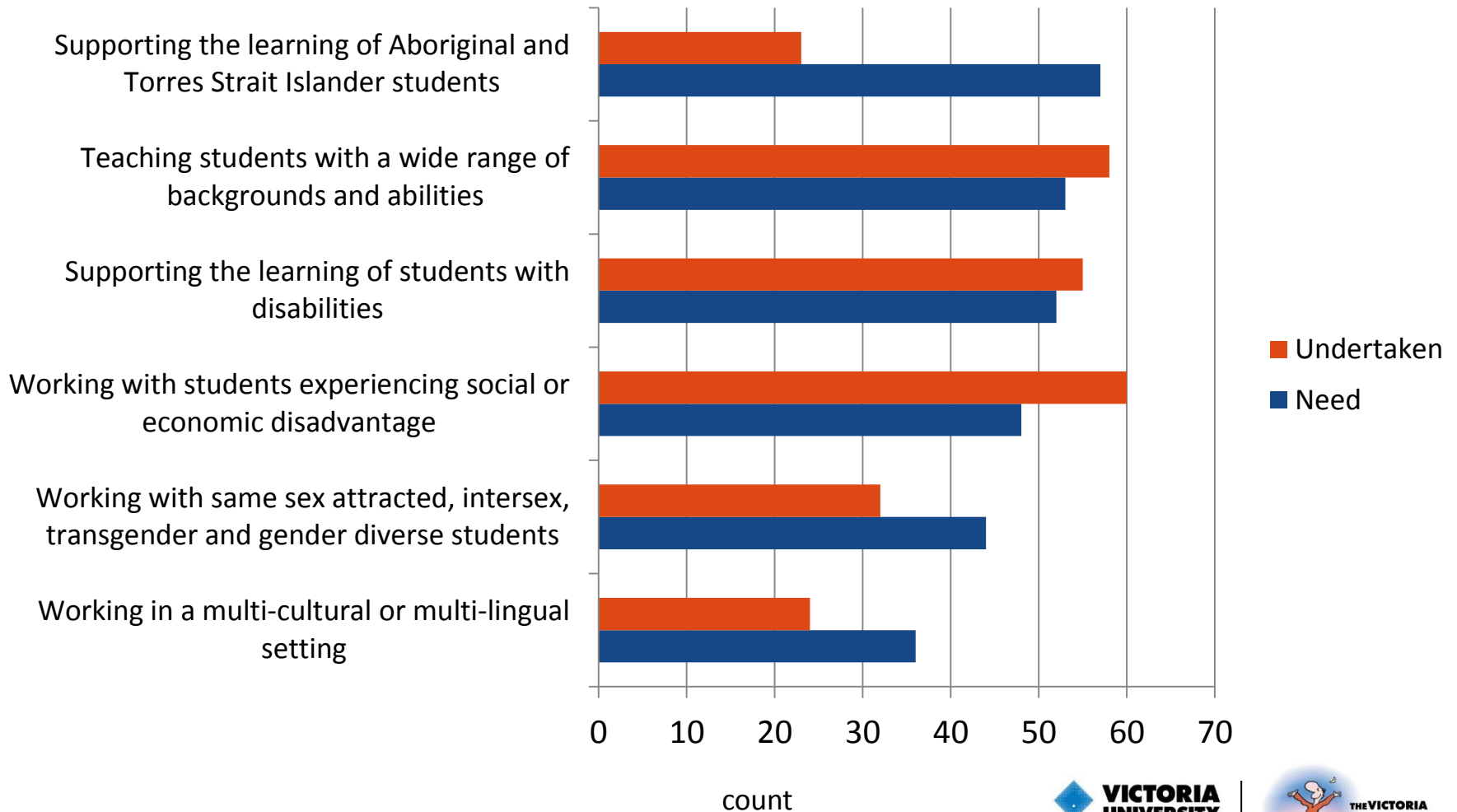
Professional Learning – What have you undertaken in the last 12 months and what do you need more of?
Instructional Practices & Curriculum

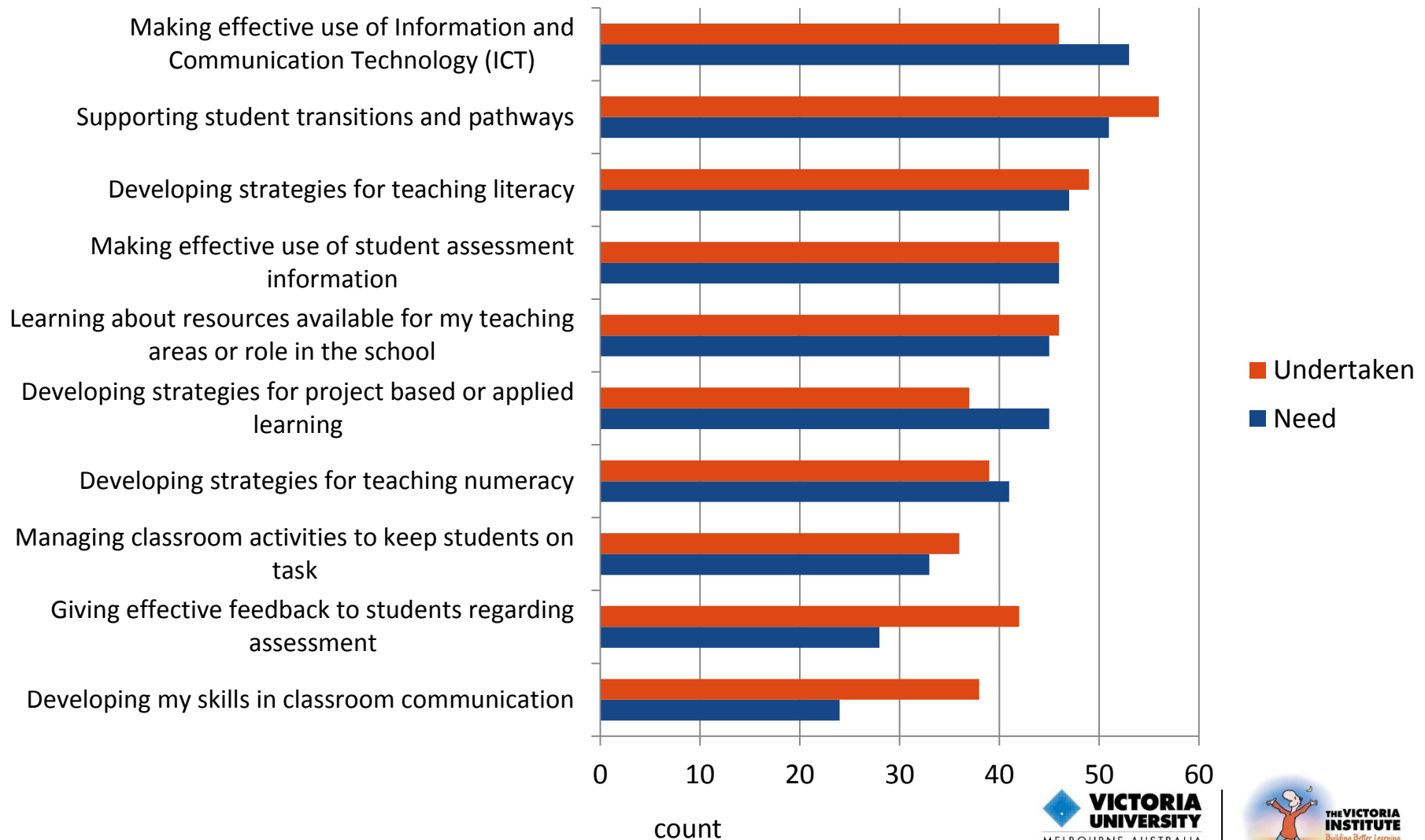# Professional Learning – What have you undertaken in the last 12 months and what do you need more of?
Self focused
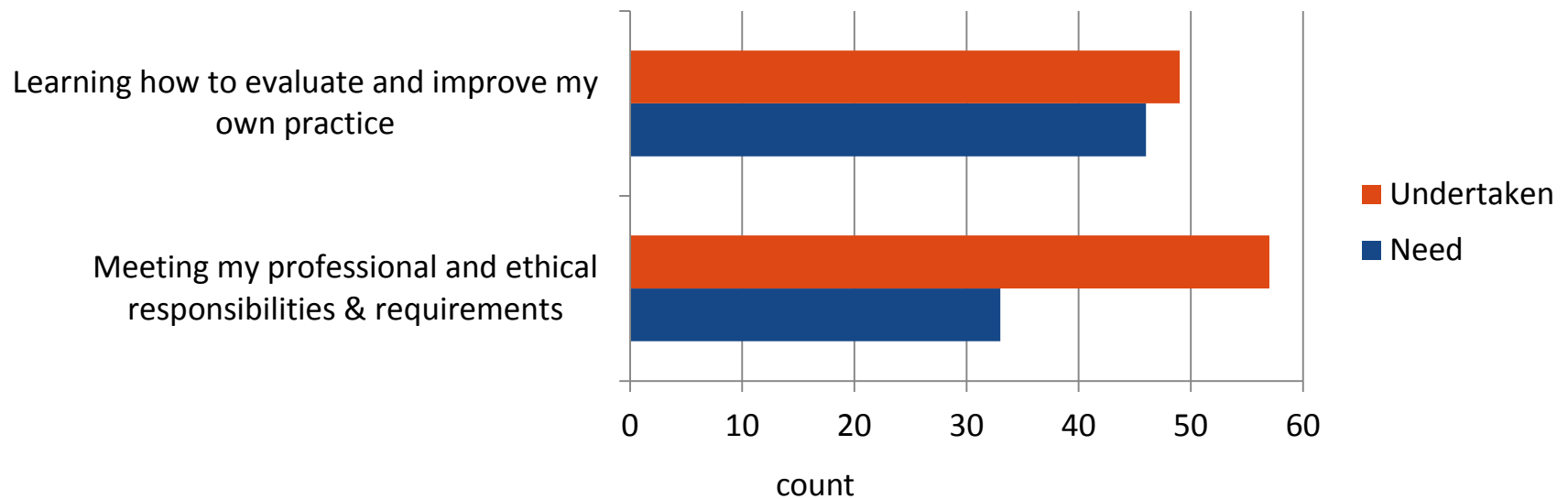
Top three PL areas people had **undertaken** across categories

- Student welfare and wellbeing
- Child / youth mental health training
- Working with students experiencing social or economic disadvantage

■ Undertaken

0   20   40   60   80
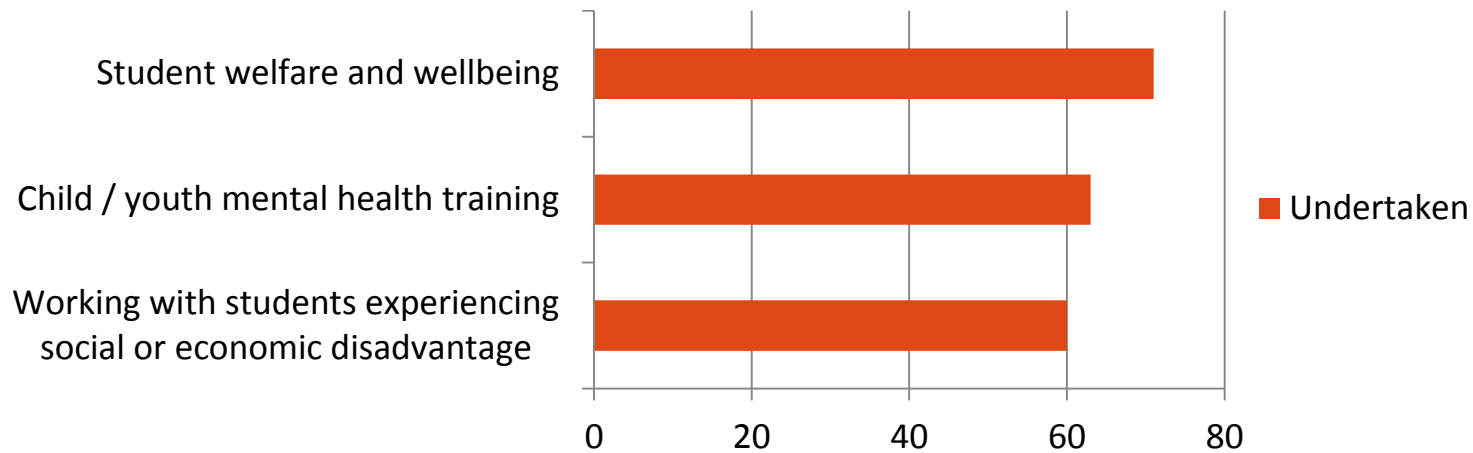
Top three PL areas of perceived a **need** across categories

- Supporting students with substance use concerns
- Trauma Informed Practice
- Supporting the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

■ Need

0   20   40   60   80

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE
Building Better Learning
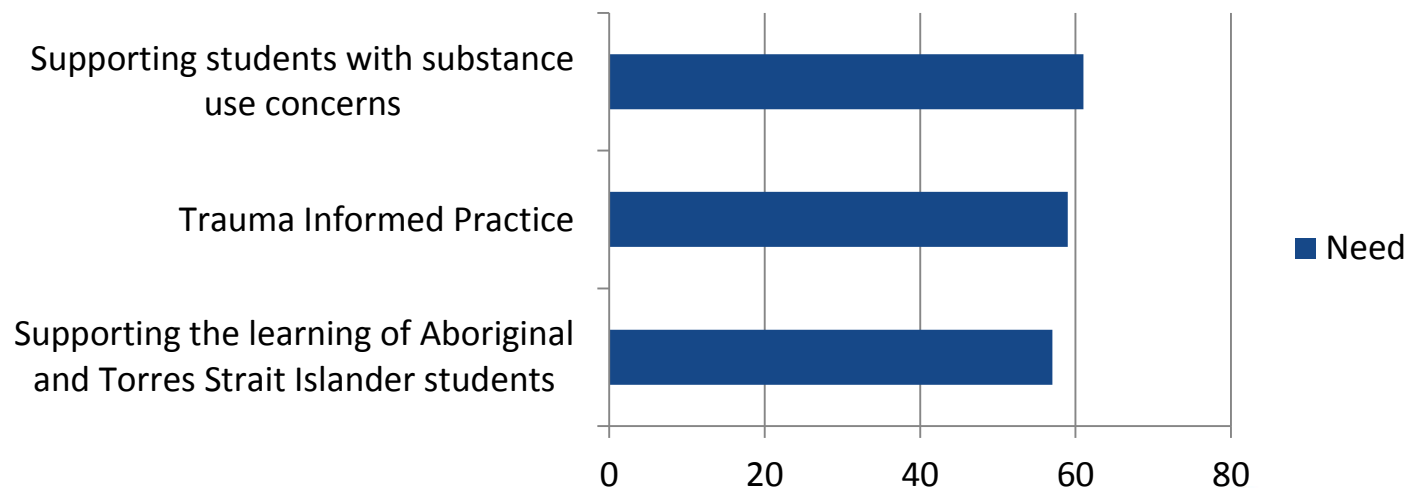
PL like to see available to staff in FLPs

- Explicit teaching practices in literacy and numeracy that cater for low level learners who are teenagers!
- Classroom management in particular for students with a variety of barriers and social / emotional issues
- I would like there to be clear Legal guidance around duty of care in regards to the use of drugs and dealers onsite.
- a workshop that educates staff on how to deal with suicide of a young person within flexible and inclusive learning program as this not only affects the students but the trainers. Also this training needs to involve post suicide issues.
- The opportunity for staff to be able to visit other schools and programs. Even outside of Victoria.
- FREE resources, podcasts or short videos on literacy and numeracy ideas and strategies on a central website

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE
Building Better Learning

Organisations where accessed relevant PL
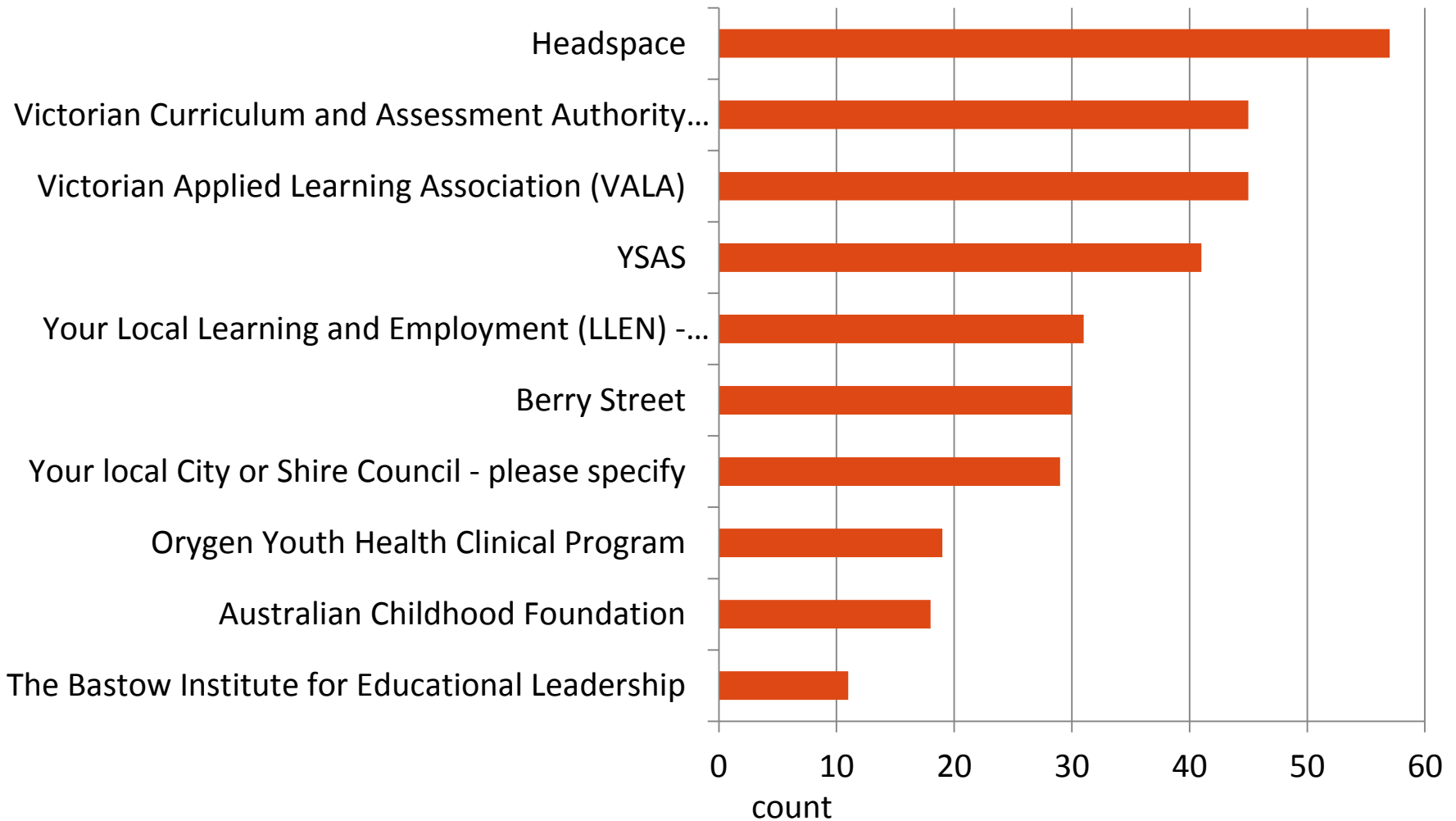
Types of PL activities participated in & helpfulness for role

Collaborative learning activities with other colleagues at my school (n=76)

Regular informal conv's w one or more colleagues to aid yr prof dev (n=91)

Courses, wshops or pres'ns led by an external provider (n=83)

Education conferences or seminars (n=73)

Professional reading to aid your professional development (n=86)

Research or inquiry proj on a topic of interest to you profesionally (n=41)

Mentoring or coaching as part of a formal school arrangement (n=49)

Courses, workshps or presentatns led by staff @ my school / prog (n=81)

Obs visits to other flexible & inclusive learning progs or schools (n=43)

Collab learning activities w colleagues @ one or more other schools (n=61)

Degree prog relevant to current role (e.g. Bachelors, Masters, PhD (n=36)

Peer obs or shadowing of colleagues (doing the obs or being obs'd) (n=54)

Courses, workshops or presentations led by staff from another FILP (n=65)

Observation visits to business premises, public orgs, non-govt orgs (n=41)

Particip'n in on-line netwk of colleagues formd specific'ly for PD (n=50)

Regular reflective writing to aid your professional development (n=48)

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Very Helpful ■ Helpful ■ Of some help ■ Not helpful

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE Building Better Learning
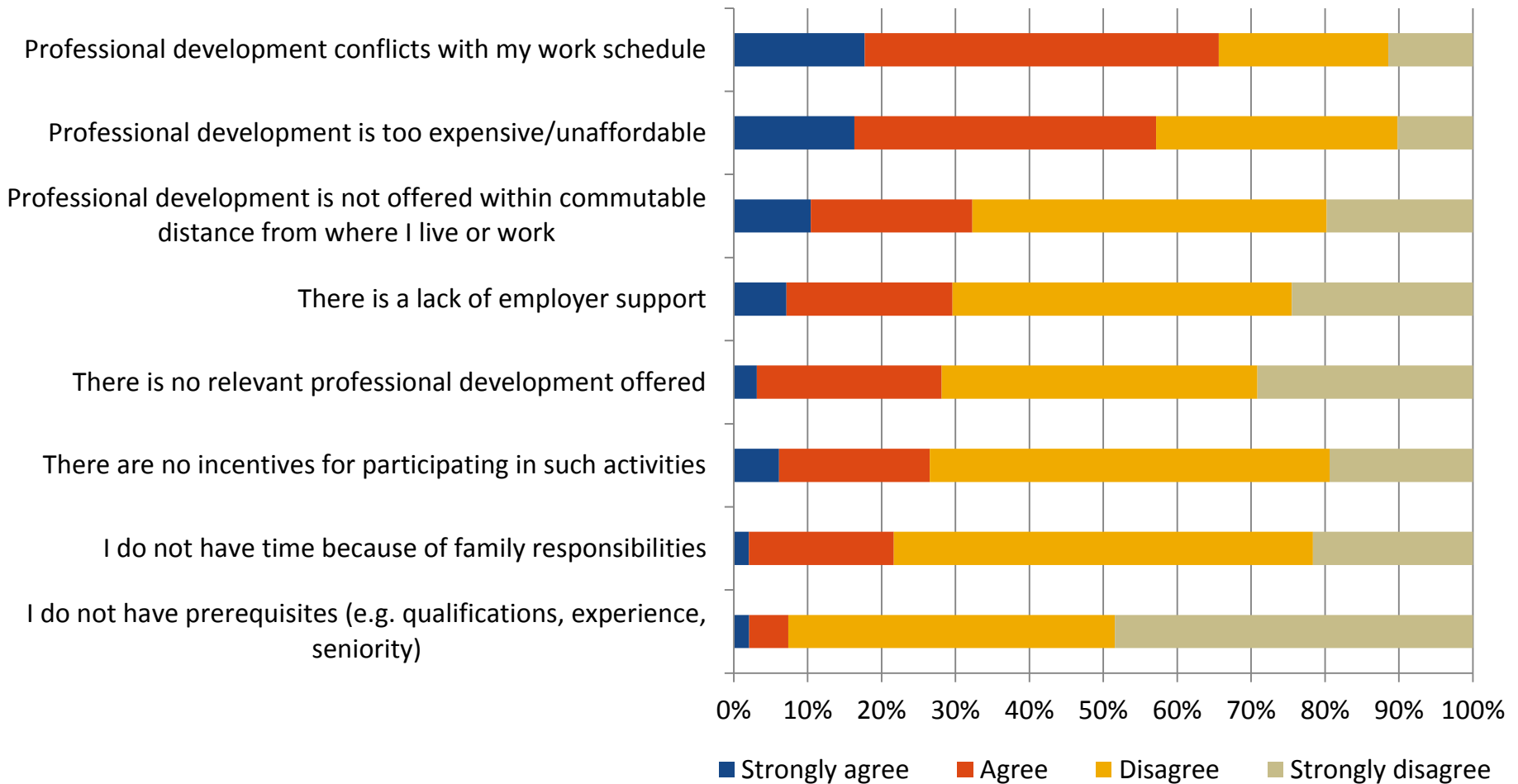
PL activities found highly useful

- Shadowing colleagues in the initial stages of my employment meant that I could visually grasp the concept of the school and how it runs on a day to day basis

- Weekly professional learning meetings - these are planned around our whole school learning needs in teaching and learning as well as wellbeing, therefore targeted and run by our colleagues.

- We had a fairly informal Q&A session with some experts from the police, youth justice, AOD, mental health etc. and it was nice to be able to share stories and ask questions and everyone felt much more confident afterwards.

- Bridges over poverty PD was one of the most insightful PD's on learning how low SES families operate. The PD enabled me to understand the patterns of behaviour that I was being challenged with on a daily basis.

- VALA conference was/is a great resource that looks at a range of learning resources/ideas that are specifically targeted at flexible learning

Support for the PL participated in

Type of Support	% of our FLP survey participants	% of Australian lower secondary school teachers *
Personally paid for some or all of the PD	43%	25%
Received scheduled time off for activities that took place during my regular working hours	80%	80%

* Data from: *An analysis of teacher response to TALIS* **2013**: *Final Report* (Freeman et al 2014)

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE *Building Better Learning*

Barriers to accessing PL

Delivering PL to others

"...I see this as a system in which we all need to feed into it so we can tap each others resources and also provide support to each other- given that the young people we work with are complex and have complex needs."

25 to others in 'mainstream' schools,

Many used knowledge pertinent to FLPs. For example:

- Working with challenging / at risk students

- Individualised programs

- Different styles of teaching

- Teaching literacy to low achieving students

Some were general. For example:

- Moodle training

47 to others in FLPs, such as:

- Teacher practice (eg. Dealing with individual differences, challenging behaviours, keeping older students motivated)

- Curriculum related (eg. Literacy, numeracy)

- Hosting visits / learning observations

- Conference presentations & organising

- Teaching about 'our' model / approach

- Computer system training

- Requirements (eg. Duty of care, compliance, validation of assessment)

- Resource sharing & discussion of practice

Thank you!

For more information & for a copy of the report in 2016 contact:

Vicky Plows vicky.plows@vu.edu.au

Project webpage:

http://tinyurl.com/PLforFILPsProjectVU