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Career Advice Activities in Victorian Schools

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Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic)

YACVic is the peak body and leading policy advocate on young people's issues in Victoria. YACVic's vision is that young Victorians have their rights upheld and are valued as active participants in their communities. As a peak body, we work closely with young Victorians and the sector that supports them to deliver effective advocacy, events, training, resources and support – so that young people can live their best lives. We're driven by our valuable members and their vision for a positive future for young Victorians.

Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC)

VicSRC is the peak body representing school-aged students in Victoria. It exists to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education, and fosters this through initiatives such as the student-led professional learning program Teach the Teacher, Student Voice Workshops, Congress and the VicSRC Recognition Awards. The VicSRC's vision is a student-focused education system that enhances young people's capacity to change the world.

Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS)

YDAS is Victoria's only advocacy service that works directly with young people with disability to achieve their human rights. Young people aged 12–25 with disability can access our free individual advocacy service if they need advice or help. YDAS also does ongoing systemic advocacy work to improve policy around issues that are important to young people with disability.

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Executive summary

Today's generation of secondary students face an increasingly complex, changing and precarious working world. It is more important than ever that they receive career guidance that is well-informed, relevant and engaging. Victorian schools provide a wide variety of career advice activities, and while some of it is excellent, we believe there is room for improvement.

In this submission, we highlight young people's own views: their reflections on the career advice they received and how it might have been strengthened.

Most Victorian students receive career advice at school. However, their experiences vary, and those students at highest risk of disadvantage tend to receive the least career advice and report the lowest rates of satisfaction with the advice received. Positive engagement with career advice activities tends to be lowest amongst early school leavers and students who go from school straight into the workforce, Certificate study or a traineeship. This might reflect the fact that many schools don't provide much career advice until the later years, when some students have already left. It might also reflect the more lucrative pathways that apprenticeships and university study tend to offer, and the greater confidence schools have in promoting these pathways. But ultimately it points to the need for more effective initiatives, starting earlier, to make career advice relevant, accessible and appealing to students at risk of disengagement and students seeking non-traditional pathways. Such approaches should link to initiatives to prevent early school leaving, and should engage students in flexible learning settings as well as mainstream schools.

Career advice tends to be particularly problematic (or lacking) for students with disability. These students have been promised equality – for example, Victoria's *State Disability Plan* commits to inclusive education, while the *Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities* prohibits employment discrimination and upholds the right to inclusive, quality education on an equal basis with others in the

community. Nonetheless, young people with disability continue to be highly vulnerable to poor outcomes in the transition from school to work.

It is also important to recognise that many figures shape young people's plans for life after school. Young people make clear that family, friends and the internet are all influential – usually more influential than teachers or career advisors. Schools must be supported to engage better with families especially. Particular approaches are needed to engage newly arrived families, many of whom struggle to support their children to make career plans in Australia. These young people need high quality assistance from teachers and youth workers and broader “bridging” networks to support them into the workforce.

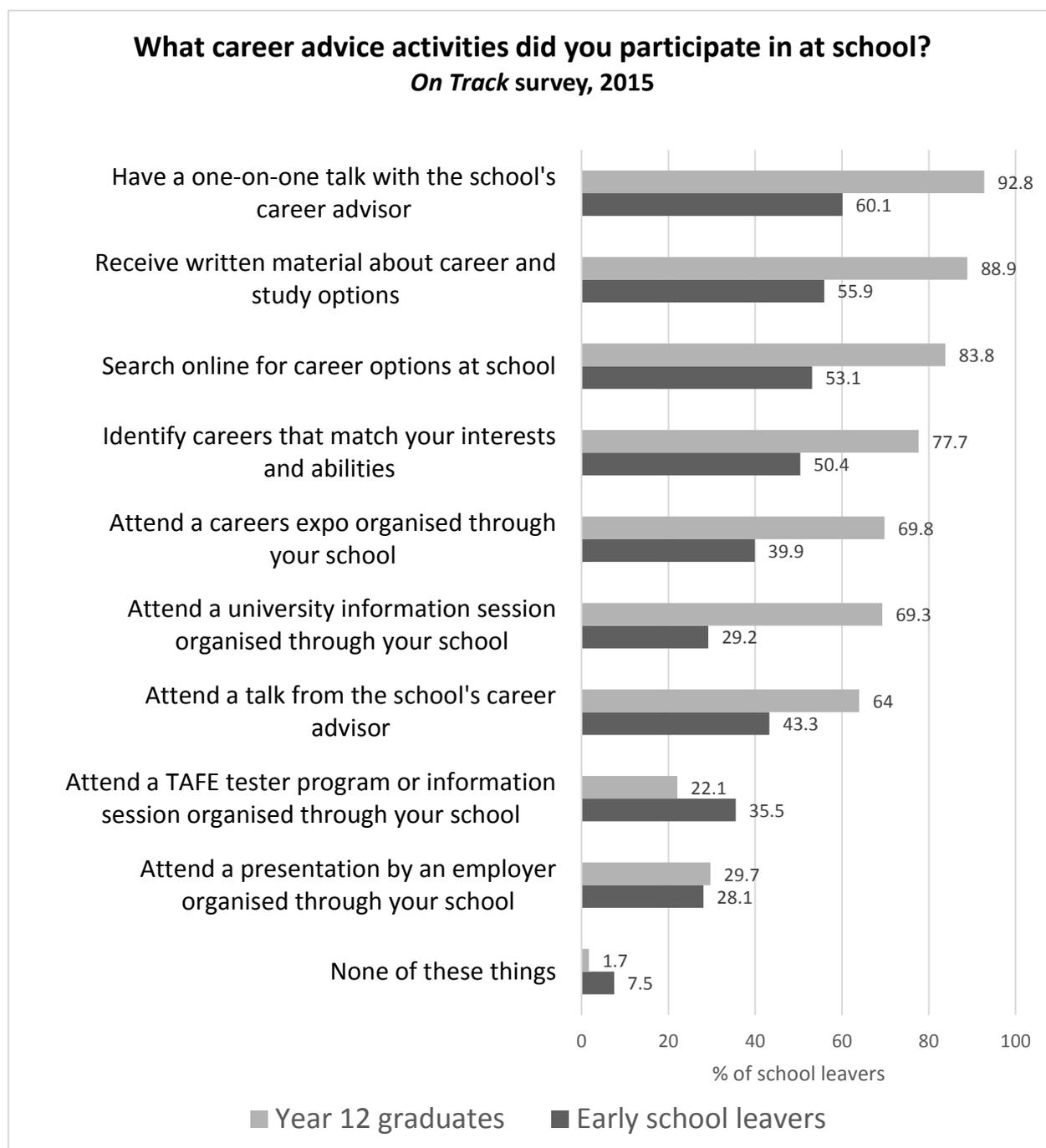
Young people's career plans are also powerfully shaped by social expectations about the different pathways open to female and male students. It's important schools are supported to address limiting gender stereotypes proactively, so all students can explore a wide range of options for meaningful, rewarding careers.

In this submission, we also emphasise that school students are not merely the workforce of the future; many of them have jobs already. While this can be a great experience, young workers are also vulnerable to exploitation and harm. It's important that career advice activities don't just take the “long view”, but also support young people to deal with issues they are facing in the workforce now.

Ultimately, we submit that schools cannot be expected to lead and manage career advice activities alone. They must be supported to work effectively with other expert stakeholders, notably the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), employers and unions, as well as Navigator and Reconnect. Strong collaborations are necessary to link students from an early age to career advice activities which are diverse, relevant and engaging, and which give students and families an informed understanding of career paths and desirable job skills – now and in the future. These activities should help young people to identify their strengths and passions, build skills, confidence, mentoring relationships and networks, and make practical plans for the short and long term.

What do young people say about the career advice they received?

In 2015, the *On Track* survey (Department of Education and Training) surveyed 55,504 young Victorians who had graduated from Year 12 or equivalent six months earlier, along with 15,959 early school leavers from that year.^{1*}

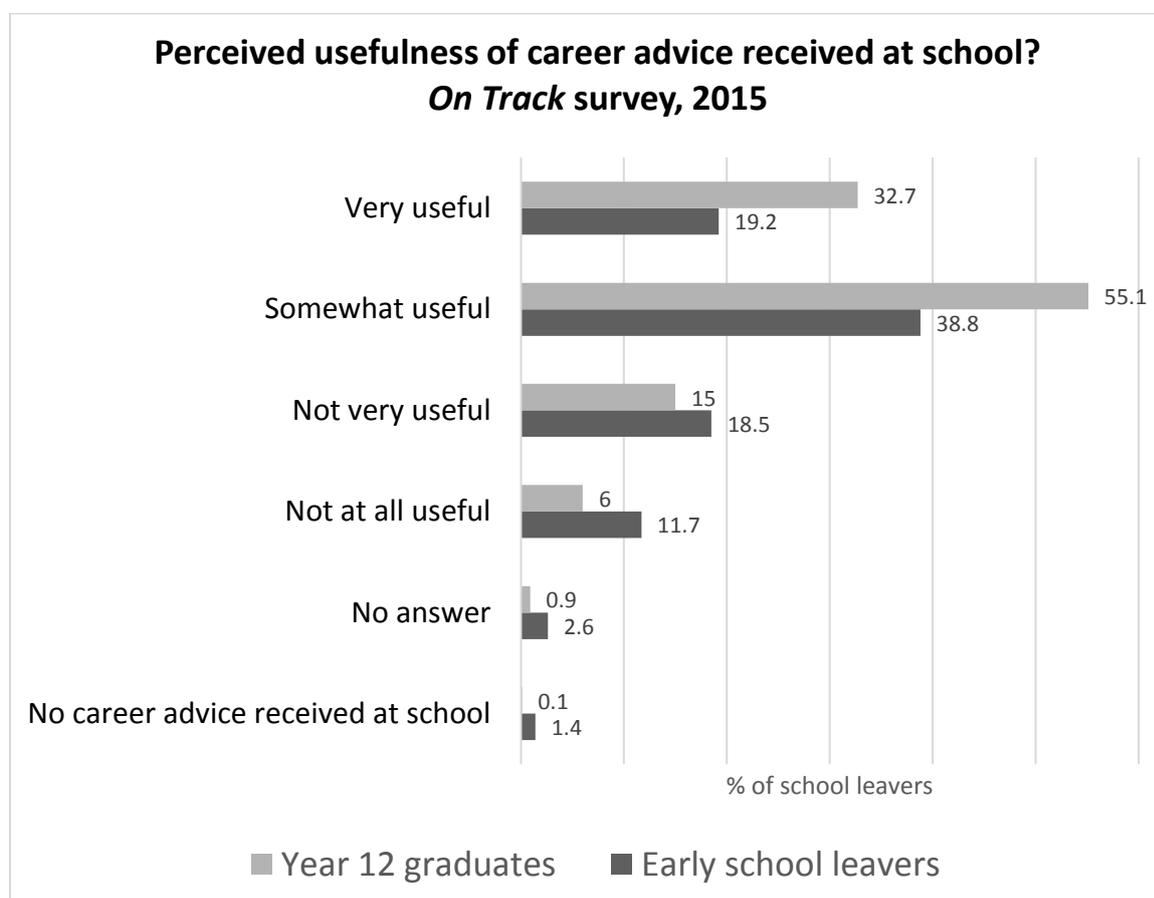


* Note: the survey response rate for early school leavers is much lower than that of Year 12 graduates, and therefore possibly less representative. Presumably it is harder for researchers to reach early school leavers experiencing transience and disadvantage.

These findings indicate that most secondary students take part in some career advice activities, but that engagement is much lower for early school leavers. The only exception is activities run by the TAFEs.

Career advice activities, if integrated with the rest of the curriculum, provide a great opportunity to reach young people at risk of disengagement and clarify for them how their schooling can link to jobs and careers. At present, it seems, this does not happen enough. The lower involvement of early school leavers in career advice activities might reflect the fact that some schools don't provide career advice until Year 11, by which point some students have already left. Moreover, many career advice activities are "one offs" (see table above), which a student might easily miss if their school attendance was erratic or part-time. It is also possible that students at risk of disengagement receive less encouragement from adults and peers to take part in a wide range of career advice activities.

Early school leavers are also less likely than Year 12 graduates to report finding their school career advice useful.



On Track also tells us that early school leavers are less likely than Year 12 graduates to report having done work experience or structured workplace learning while at school – 67.3% compared to 86.4% – and that early school leavers are less likely than Year 12 graduates to find this work experience useful.²

Career advice activities and work experience present a chance (often missed) to help improve outcomes for young people at risk of early school leaving. The fiscal and social costs of early school leaving are high. Adults without a Year 12 or equivalent qualification are more likely than university graduates to have long-term health problems; they are more than twice as likely as university graduates to rely on income support, and they tend to earn much lower salaries, translating into loss of potential tax revenue. A 2017 report by the Mitchell Institute urged that students at risk of disengagement be supported by stronger alignment between early childhood education, schooling, VET and higher education, and the building of young people’s critical thinking, creativity, curiosity and communication skills, as well as a high quality VET sector to promote equity and drive economic growth.³ There seems an obvious role for career advice activities within all this.

However, it is not just a question of *when* a young person leaves school. Young people’s views on the usefulness of their school careers advice also vary according to the work and study pathways they take after leaving school.

For example, in 2011 the *On Track* survey interviewed 2,346 Year 12 or equivalent graduates and 1,130 early school leavers who had left school four years earlier. When asked to reflect back on the career advice they’d received at school, the most positive responses came from young people now doing apprenticeships. Almost two-thirds of apprentices – Year 12 graduates *and* early school leavers – reflected that their school career advice had been very useful or fairly useful. Year 12 graduates now studying at university were also relatively positive, with 61% reflecting that their school career advice had been very useful or fairly useful.⁴

Apprenticeships and university are commonly believed to lead to more gainful employment than other pathways; this might explain why many young people on

these pathways felt happy with the advice they'd received. At the same time, some schools seem more confident promoting apprenticeships and university; possibly the guidance they provide is more accurate and engaging as a result.

In contrast, when *On Track* surveyed young people who were working full-time or studying at Certificate level four years after leaving school, they found that only around half of these young people felt their school career advice had been useful. The least positive responses came from early school leavers who were working part-time four years after leaving school. Only 44% of them thought their school career advice had been useful.⁵

There is a correlation between high rates of disadvantage in a community and high numbers of young people going straight from school into work, Certificate study or traineeships.⁶ The dissatisfaction these young people express with their school careers advice might reflect their general struggles to stay engaged in education and find rewarding work. It also raises questions about the quality and quantity of career advice activities provided for students in disadvantaged areas.

Unfortunately, *On Track* does not seem to break down the results of their regular survey according to disability status. Nor does *On Track* appear to record the career advice given to students at specialist schools. This is unfortunate, because we know students with disability are vulnerable to poor employment outcomes. For example, in 2015 the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that only 53% of Australians with disability of working age participated in the workforce, and only 17% of Australians with a disability hold a Bachelor degree or above (compared to 30% of the rest of Australia).⁷

Of the 270 young people from specialist schools surveyed by *On Track* in 2015, over 47% had gone from school into a day service and nearly 9% were out of the labour market altogether. Almost three-quarters said they had not received any help with job seeking or job placement.⁸ Once again, there seems to be a missed opportunity here for quality career advice to help improve these young people's prospects.

Listening to young people: students speak about preparing for a career

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body representing school-aged students in Victoria. They facilitate student-led advocacy in schools and communities and support a student-focused education system that enhances young people's capacity to change the world.

In their 2016 policy platform, VicSRC identified that young people need an education that can prepare them for a rapidly changing world characterised by job insecurity, globalisation, social diversity, and high exposure to technology. To be ready, they will need strong digital and financial literacy and skills in problem solving, creativity and communication. Students need to be actively involved in their own education and keen to go on learning beyond their time at school.

At their annual Congress (2017), approximately 220 students gathered to identify priority issues for advocacy, based on consultations with other students around Victoria. They identified "Real World Skills" as a priority, arguing that the curriculum should have a stronger emphasis on the skills and knowledge to prepare students for independent adulthood.

Comments from students on the VicSRC executive included:

"Career advisors/educators offer the best advice to those students who have already identified a career."

"Career Education in YR 10 is too late, it should start earlier with discussions about different pathways and ideas."

"Students would like to explore broader career ideas rather than specific pathways."

"Would like careers counsellors/advisors/educators to have a more holistic idea of the students' journey rather than based on a transactional experience."

Listening to young people: Rural and regional youth forums

In 2016, YACVic Rural worked with the Victorian Government Office for Youth to deliver youth forums in 12 locations around Victoria, involving 472 young people.

Employment was a hot topic. It was mentioned almost 200 times by the young people, and it came up as a priority at every forum, especially in Morwell, Ballarat, Dunkeld and Dandenong. The young people spoke about high youth unemployment, the lack of job opportunities in regional Victoria, and the barriers that exist to young people getting paid work.

Young people called for training in schools in “life skills” and “how to be an adult”. They wanted more help learning about things like financial literacy, taxation, and using new technology. Their other ideas for action included:

“Give young people training on small business and entrepreneurial skills so young people can create their own employment.”

“We need to learn entrepreneurial skills, how to build a portfolio, start a business. We need a wider scope of practical learning.”

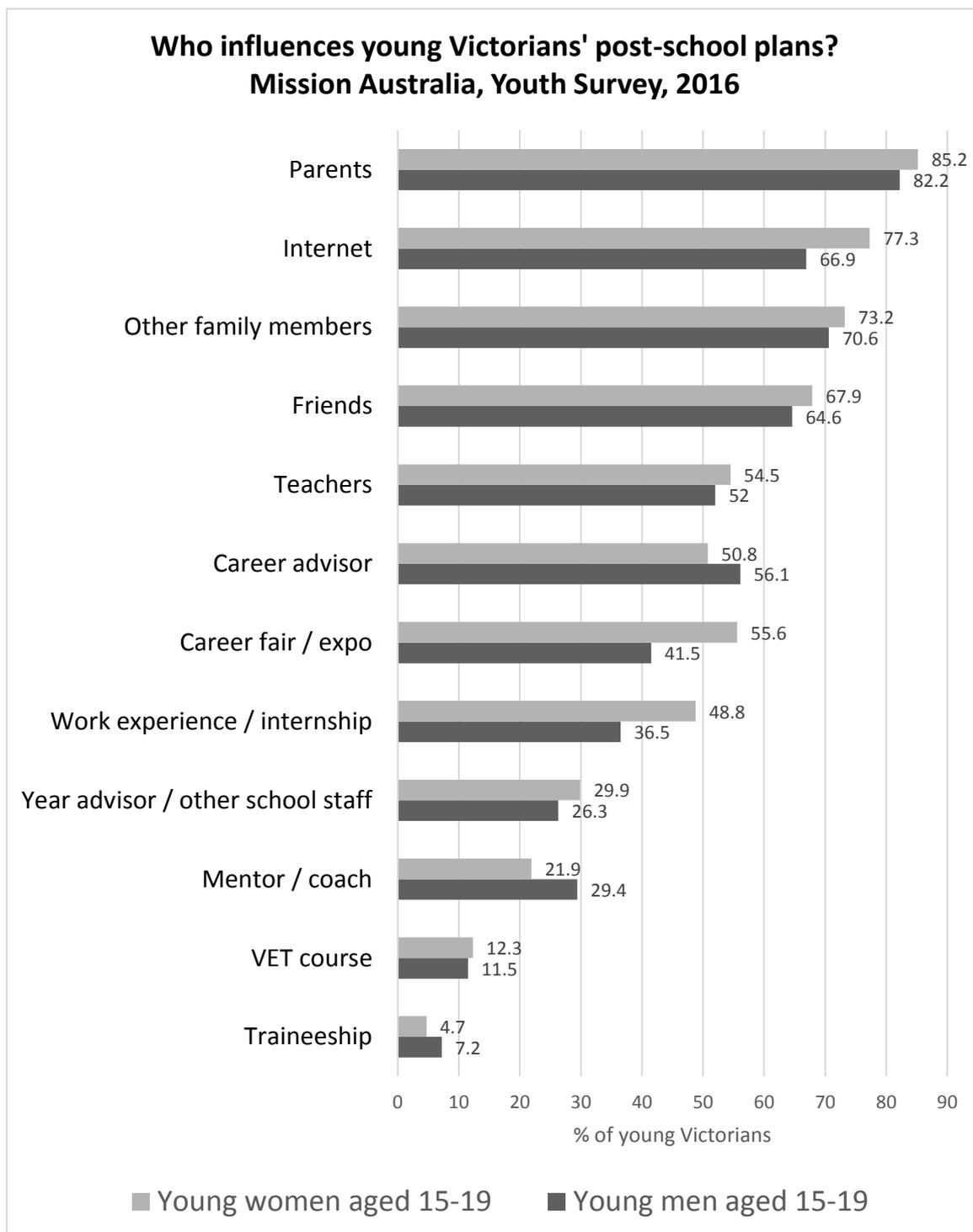
“Create youth employment networks and workshops that encourage local employers to connect and mentor young people in their communities.”

“Grant youth services finances to initiate youth-led micro enterprises.”

“Give youth the tools and education to be work ready and have every opportunity to be employed.”

According to young people, who influences their career planning?

In 2016, Mission Australia surveyed 4,178 young Victorians aged 15-19. Almost 97% were studying full-time and over 78% aspired to go to university, so this sample did not capture all young people’s experiences.⁹ Nonetheless, their responses provide useful insights into the forces shaping young people’s post-school plans.



It is hard to know whether the majority of the influential figures listed in the previous table are engaging better with young women than with young men, or whether young women are simply more attuned to the different people exerting influence on them. Interestingly, one of the few groups who appear to influence young men more than young women are school careers advisors.¹⁰

The role of parental influence in shaping young people's career aspirations was also highlighted in a 2014 study through the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, using data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY). The researchers found that, along with academic performance, parental expectation was the most important predictor of the careers secondary students aspired to. For example, 15-year-olds whose parents wanted them to attend university described wanting to enter much higher-status careers than the students whose parents did not expect them to get a university education.¹¹

The picture looks different for those young people whose families are unable to provide much support with career planning or job seeking. For example, in 2016 the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) surveyed 126 young Victorians aged 16-30 from 45 different cultural backgrounds, asking them about the people who influenced their transitions to employment. Many of the young people were highly aspirational, and family was very important to them. However, many described feeling isolated as they entered the workforce. They had very few professional role models or connections, and did not know who to ask for advice and help. Many reflected that their parents and elders did not have the knowledge or connections to help them into well-paid work in Australia.¹²

These young people told CMY that they relied strongly on their friends to help them find work. They also mentioned the crucial roles that can be played by youth workers, community workers and teachers. For some young people, these adults were their only contacts outside of their cultural community. Young people who had taken part in leadership initiatives and meaningful volunteering said this helped them develop networks and experience too.¹³ In addition, MYAN Australia argues that young people from refugee backgrounds, in particular, can also

benefit from support to develop basic employability skills in a meaningful work context, as well as help to overcome language barriers and disrupted schooling.¹⁴

Another key factor influencing secondary students' career aspirations concerns sex-based socialisation. For example, the abovementioned LSAY study compared the career ambitions of 15-year-old Australian students with the jobs they were working in ten years later (in 2009). At the age of fifteen, female and male students already showed very different career aspirations. When asked what careers they thought they would have as adults, the most common answers from male students were: computing support technicians, motor mechanics, police officers, computing professionals, architects and engineers. The most common answers from female students were: designers and illustrators, psychologists, lawyers, nurses, primary school teachers and child care workers.¹⁵

Ten years later, the young people were not necessarily working in the jobs they'd aspired to at fifteen. But their jobs still showed a significant gender divide. The most common jobs for the young men at age 25 were sales assistants, electricians, ICT support technicians, retail managers, plumbers, carpenters and police officers. The most common jobs for the young women were teachers, sales assistants, nurses, child carers, retail managers and accountants.¹⁶

The work of Kira Clarke, Linda Simon and Elaine Butler (amongst others) has demonstrated that young women's career aspirations are limited from a very early age by sexist stereotypes, as well as fears about male-dominated workplaces. Women continue to make up only 31% of university-level STEM graduates and a mere 12% of vocational-level STEM graduates. Women make up very small proportions of the labour force in some major and lucrative industries, including construction (12%), mining (15%) and utilities (23%). "Gender-blind" approaches to career planning are ineffective and do not seem to challenge the division between "male" and "female" professions.¹⁷ Well-informed, proactive approaches are needed to counter sexist and limiting assumptions about career pathways, and ensure that all students can access a genuine range of choices for meaningful, gainful employment.

Listening to young people: career advice for young people with disability

In 2017, the Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS) consulted young people aged 12-25 on the topic of disability, education and employment, with a focus on what they considered “inclusive practice”. YDAS spoke with ten young people in person and surveyed another 20 young people online. The young people had a varied lived experiences of disability, including vision impairment, autism, physical disability and chronic illness. They described the transition between education and employment as filled with uncertainty and often presenting great difficulty. Comments from the young people included:

“I’m worried that they aren’t preparing us for after school. I want to know how to pay bills and how to act in the workplace.”

“I was immediately told that certain careers were off limits because of my disability.”

“There was very little focus on my future and the idea that I would have ambitions; I was told to ‘just have fun’.”

“During high school I was treated as though I didn’t have a disability. Teachers had the same expectations of me as they did for students without disability ... as a result the career advice I received included a broad range of possible pathways.”

“Attending a mainstream school ... my career advisor had very little knowledge on the challenges I would face trying to get work as a person with a disability ... They did not know how accessible my university would be or what supports would be available...I was left asking people like my physiotherapist for answers.”

“Careers advisors only had basic information about supports, I was left to contact TAFEs and Universities myself.”

“I am unsure of the future I can have while managing my chronic illness. I am constantly trying to catch up and justify my own inclusion.”

Young people, school and work: the bigger picture

To improve career advice to Victorian students, it is important to recognise the wider issues that will shape their transition into the workforce.

Firstly, young people do not experience one straightforward transition from school to work. The Young Workers Centre notes that nearly 44% of school-aged young Australians have jobs, and over 200,000 young Victorians aged 15-24 are working while studying full-time. There is value in schools treating their students not merely as future workers, but as current ones, who would benefit from education about issues such as minimum rates of pay, penalty rates, enterprise agreements, workplace bullying, health and safety, and workplace disputes.¹⁸

Secondly, entering the workforce is becoming increasingly difficult for young people. This is due in large part to the disappearance of low-qualification jobs, entry-level jobs and full-time jobs. The unemployment rate for young Victorians not in full-time education is 8.5%, compared to the general unemployment rate of 5.9%.¹⁹ According to VicHealth, the number of young Victorians looking for full-time work tripled between 2009-16.²⁰ The Brotherhood of St Laurence recently reported that 50,500 young Australians have spent a year or more job-hunting without success. The greatest barrier they reported was “lack of experience”.²¹

The situation is particularly difficult for young people who do not have a post-school qualification. 16% of young Victorians who left school in 2015 without a Year 12 qualification were unemployed and looking for work six months later.²² Of young Victorian school-leavers in 2015, the majority of those who went straight from school into employment ended up in part-time jobs six months later, although most wished they could have found full-time jobs instead.²³

Even for well-qualified people, working life is becoming more complex. According to VicHealth, in 2014 only 68.1% of Bachelor-degree graduates found full-time work within four months of graduation.²⁴

Nor is this a fleeting problem. The Life Patterns survey of “Gen Y” young Australians found that ten years after leaving school, only 71% were in full-time jobs. Of those who were employed, more than half worked longer than 40 hours in an average week, and 77% worked non-standard hours. These young adults were struggling to translate their studies into stable careers. Most wanted job security and full-time work, but these things were hard to attain. At the age of 26-27, only 31% of them believed they would have a secure, well-paid job in five years’ time.²⁵

In the meantime, it is becoming common for young people to spend years working in jobs which they do not see as their ultimate “career”. For example, when *On Track* surveyed 2,346 Year 12 graduates from the class of 2011 four years after graduation, they found that only 40% agreed that they were currently working in the kind of job they would like as their career.²⁶ The first jobs performed by young Victorians tend to be manual, part-time and low-pay. The most common jobs include sales assistants, waiters, checkout operators, counter hands at food outlets, kitchen hands and storepersons.²⁷ The amount of time young people spend working in these jobs varies, but it can be several years or more. We suggest there is value in school career advice addressing some of the issues young people will encounter there.

In particular, young workers in their first jobs can be vulnerable to harm and exploitation. The Young Workers Centre has found that less than half of young Victorians who work unsociable hours are paid penalty rates for that work, while young women are at high risk of sexual harassment in the workplace.²⁸ Young people often lack the knowledge, confidence or resources to pursue a workplace grievance. For example, Young Workers Centre asserts that more than half of young workers who are underpaid believe they are being paid the legal minimum rate, and that 1 in 3 young people who get injured or sick at work do not report it.²⁹

There would be great value in students building skills in financial awareness and planning, awareness of workplace rights and hazards, and greater understanding of the opportunities and risks of self-employment and the “gig” economy.

Listening to young people: young people speak about school career advice

In November 2017, VicSRC and YACVic circulated an online survey inviting young people to reflect on their experiences of career advice in Victorian schools.

The young people we surveyed described a wide range of approaches used at their various schools. Activities included: guidance from teachers on which courses to choose, mock job interviews, reading material about careers, careers tests, presentations from universities, university open days, interviews with careers counsellors, work experience, and lessons in writing resumes and job applications. The ages at which career advice activities commenced varied a lot between schools, and the young people expressed a range of views on how useful the activities were.

We asked: **“Can you recommend any changes to your experience of career advice at school?”**

“To not make students feel like University is the only option, to let students know that it’s okay to work, go to tafe etc.” (Year 11 student)

“I wish career advice wasn’t limited to just secondary to tertiary education advice as life and career options are so much more broad. Schools already are quite impressionable with the restricting education system so I wish there was more advice in the wider aspects of life and opportunities.” (Year 12 student)

“Please have up-to-date advice that is reviewed regularly for relevance. Please have flexible solutions on hand when students are disadvantaged to do work in the short term. Please have holistic and hands on approaches that suit students who are in low-SES.” (School leaver)

“More one on one work with students as well as information to not only empower students with knowledge but MOTIVATION!!” (Year 12 student)

“More discussion about future options, what sort of stuff do you like doing or want to do. maybe a few information session or meetings.” (Year 10 student)

We asked: “What was missing from the advice you received?”

“Career advice that matched my values and potential.” (School leaver)

“the part about future career options” (Year 10 student)

“Current interview skills, resume writing, also how the nature of work was changing and that there was going to be all these new jobs etc. The job I do now as a 27 yr-old (comms/social media) has changed dramatically from my careers goals and ideas when I was 17.” (School leaver)

“Flexibility and up to date education on the current jobs environment.” (School leaver)

“I found my careers advisor and school board were solely focused on results rather than ‘careers’. I found from year 10 (or equivalent) onwards; they would rather talk students out of career goals if they did not think their grades would match those the school intended to acquire as an average. Several students were told they were better off not attempting VCE and rather quitting, to aim for ‘full time employment’. Personally, the advice I received was not tailored to my interests, talents or abilities. Rather, I received a questionnaire for career paths I may like to follow based on which boxes I ticked in relation to my interests. I received no information regarding studies, universities, mentors, scholarships, relocating (my VCE was based in rural VIC), etcetera. I was not guided beyond passing exams.” (School leaver)

“The advice is missing compassion and support to accommodate each individual as we will all have individual career pathways.” (Year 12 student)

School-based career advice – limitations and capacity issues

Many schools provide good career advice activities for their students. However, approaches vary between schools, and strong investment in good practice career advice is not always there.³⁰ A recent doctoral thesis on the role of career counsellors in Victorian secondary schools found that career counsellors come from very diverse backgrounds, have different approaches to their work, and are under a range of pressures from within the school community.³¹

We note the concerns raised by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, including:

- Many students have limited access to careers information until quite late in their schooling, e.g. Years 11 and 12.
- Many students have little realistic knowledge of the career options that exist, or of employer expectations. They often do not get enough opportunities to experiment with different vocational options before committing to a course or career pathway. Students – especially those at risk of disengagement from school – need better help to develop a realistic “line of sight” to the jobs and careers they want.
- Some careers teachers have very limited time to give to the role. Their levels of experience and expertise vary, and some do not receive sufficient professional development in this space. Some do not have strong connections to local employers, or expert, up-to-date knowledge of the range of opportunities becoming available to young people.³²

Other concerns about career advice in schools, identified by Clarke et al, include:

- In some schools, career guidance is treated as an “add on”, separate or abstracted from the normal curriculum. This makes it hard for students to see a link between what they are learning and where they want to go.
- University pathways tend to be treated and portrayed as the “gold standard”, especially for female students.

- Career “advice” and “information” can be rather passive. Broader “career exploration” should involve learning about yourself and the world of work, experiencing and identifying satisfying career options, and developing effective strategies to realise your goals.

Meanwhile, YDAS identified significant weaknesses in the career advice activities delivered to students with disability. Strong, individualised support and planning ahead of time increases the likelihood of a young person with a disability making a successful transition from school to work.³³ However, many schools do not implement such planning, often due to lack of resources or knowledge about supporting young people with disability.

Under such circumstances, the parents of a student with a disability can become solely responsible for helping their child decide on post-school pathways. In many instances, parents must even take responsibility for finding accessible work experience placements for their children. Research conducted by the National Disability Services reported that 80% of young Australians with intellectual disabilities never took part in work experience.³⁴

On the basis of their conversations with students and parents, YDAS reflected that students of special schools, in particular, seem to receive little career advice, and have limited transition options presented to them. Ultimately, a successful transition from school to work can be facilitated by a mainstream education system which comprehensively includes all students. Segregated environments further the isolation of people with disability and diminish their potential for social and economic participation.

Supporting students with disability: an international comparison

YDAS engages young people with varied educational and transitional experiences. These case studies compare the career advice and transitional practices experienced by two young people in contact with YDAS.

Hannah is a wheelchair user who attended a mainstream public school in New Zealand between Years 9-13. Hannah recalls that the school had a culture of high expectations and committed to ensuring Hannah receive the same opportunities as her peers without disability. Classrooms were made accessible and curriculums were altered to best enhance Hannah's development. All students took part in regular, individualised, one-on-one career advice sessions, work experience and internships. The school assumed sole responsibility for finding accessible, meaningful and relevant work experience placements. Hannah's final year of school included a class with a focus on life skills, providing presentations from banks, universities and other institutions. Care was taken to make sure that all students had the information needed to make informed decisions and successfully transition from secondary education into a number of potential pathways.

Kevin is a 17-year-old wheelchair user attending Year 11 at a mainstream Victorian state school. He excels academically but is often treated as a "problem student" and isolated from his peers due to poorly implemented supports. Kevin and his mother expressed that the school treated his inclusion as a burden and there was a little education for teachers around disability and inclusive practice. Kevin feels his school has low expectations for him. The school said they did not have the resources to find an accessible work experience placement and that if he wanted to take part in the work experience program, he and his family would have to find a placement themselves. As a result, Kevin did not take part. His poor experiences have meant that he does not expect to be included in a mainstream workplace. He recognises that he lacks the experience of his peers, e.g. the skills usually developed through a part-time job. He lacks a number of key life skills.

School-based career advice – visions for a way forward

Various approaches have been suggested to help young people prepare for the challenges of the global workforce. The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) – which asserts that today’s secondary students can expect to have 17 different jobs during their lifetime – proposes that students need a stronger grounding in creative thinking, strategic problem solving, interpersonal skills, verbal communication, and science and mathematics.³⁵ (To support this, FYA developed Worlds of Work, a flexible careers education resource that provides meaningful career-linked activities for Years 8-10 students, as well as engaging parents and carers to support their children in the transition from school to work.)

Meanwhile, the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) asserts that students need stronger support to recognise their own skills and potential, and to understand the local labour market. BSL also calls for greater attention to building students’ skills in language, literacy, numeracy, communication, job-seeking, application writing, interviewing, goal setting and career planning, as well as the generic interpersonal and social skills that are needed in every workplace.³⁶

The Smith Family has also pointed to the need to transform how we present vocational options to secondary students. They note that the VET sector provides training courses for 9 out of 10 occupations predicted to have the greatest growth in new jobs over the next five years – but very few students realise this, associating VET only with traditional trades.³⁷

We would add that the fastest growing sector by employment in Victoria is health care and social assistance, with an additional 257,000 people starting paid work since November 2014. We need a holistic plan to ensure a pool of qualified, skilled workers to fill these jobs.³⁸ Such a plan should include promoting these career paths to secondary students in accessible and accurate ways, and connecting students with mentors, networks and work experience in the sector. (We also note the recommendations of the Victorian Council of Social Service that the Victorian Government remove fees for entry level courses in the high workforce growth industry of health and community services, and that the government provide

“backbone” funding for local collaborative partnerships unlocking local employment knowledge, support and solutions. VCOSS identified that these steps would help to strengthen Victoria’s economic performance.)³⁹

Ultimately, schools cannot be expected to lead and handle career advice activities alone. They need ongoing support to work effectively with Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), in particular. The LLENs operate all around Victoria, creating strategic partnerships to improve education and transition outcomes for young people aged 10-19. They build on a strong base of local knowledge, and bring together education and training providers, employers, government, community agencies and families to improve education, training and employment outcomes for young people.

The LLENs play a particularly valuable role in rural and regional Victoria, where job prospects and career opportunities for young people are different to those in Melbourne. To give one recent example, the North Eastern LLEN has worked on the Agricultural Workforce Development Project to establish pathways for students from Year 9 into careers in agriculture and horticulture, via School-Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships, industry experience and tertiary study. The project includes school-based agriculture curriculum and work placements with local agribusiness employers/farmers. It enables skilled and knowledgeable students to find short-term work in agribusiness without risking their studies; it strengthens students' understanding of the local economy, environment and land management, and it supports farmers and employers to become role models for students. The project relies on strong relationships between schools, TAFEs, universities, industry bodies, businesses and community.⁴⁰

Career advice activities must also be well integrated with the work of the Navigator and (state) Reconnect programs. There may be challenges here; for example, we have heard that Reconnect faces administrative difficulties working with young people who are disengaged from school but still technically enrolled.

Examples of innovation in career advice activities

- **Work Inspiration:** launched as a partnership between The Smith Family, the Foundation for Young Australians and the National Australia Bank, this initiative supports workplaces and schools to equip young people for 21st century jobs. It includes strategies to discover students' talents, passions and interests and build trust and rapport between students and employers. Students are supported to complete meaningful projects at the workplace and interview staff there about their own career journeys.
- **Real Futures Generation** (Beacon Foundation): a place-based, collaborative initiative connecting young people and employers. Over the course of a year, students in take part in workplace visits, “shadowing” employees, and programs to develop transferrable workplace skills, as well as business-led classroom lessons linking education to tangible workplace tasks.
- **Robogals:** An international student-run organisation that engages girls in STEM. Robogals engage university students as volunteers to run free engineering and technology workshops in their local communities, encouraging girls in primary and secondary school to explore an interest, connect with young role models, and build confidence.
- **Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME):** a structured educational mentoring program to support Indigenous students throughout high school. AIME provides one-on-one coaching, career support and post-school transition, informed by long-term relationships with the students involved. Students who participate in AIME show very strong results in terms of Year 12 attainment and post-school transitions.
- **P-TECH:** This pilot provides students with an industry supported pathway to a STEM related diploma, advanced diploma or associate degree. Opportunities for students include work-based learning, structured work placements, apprenticeships / traineeships, paid internships, and part-time work, as well as industry mentoring and career guidance.

Recommendations

1. Support schools to strengthen the career advice activities they provide to young people. Key steps to improving career advice activities should include:
 - Schools should be supported to work in partnership with other experts, especially Local Learning and Employment Networks and community organisations which have developed effective career education resources and programs. Career advice activities should also engage employers and unions.
 - Begin early, preferably in primary school, with a focus on engaging children's curiosity, identifying and encouraging their passions, and countering any negative or limiting biases they have received from parents, friends and social stereotypes.
 - Embed vocational guidance into the secondary school curriculum – not with the aim of “channelling” children into specific jobs, but rather to expose them to a wide range of options, ensure they understand the links between the school curriculum and their future careers, and give them practice making meaningful plans about where to go and how to get there. It is also important to support students to develop well-informed and realistic expectations of the career opportunities that exist now, and those that are likely to emerge in the future. (One example is the rapidly growing and changing health and community services sector.)
 - Recognise that many students are at risk of inequality in the workforce on grounds of sex, cultural background, disability or poverty. Make an explicit commitment to countering these problems through tailored career advice activities designed to promote equality and engagement.
 - Focus on engaging families in career advice activities, especially families at risk of disadvantage, Aboriginal families, and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Build their knowledge of employment pathways and career opportunities, and how to support their children to succeed.

- Provide students with a wide range of work experience and “tasters” that enable them to build skills and networks and find out more about the day-to-day activities of particular jobs, the roles and career structures that exist in different industries, and the kinds of qualifications needed to get there. These experiences could include bringing employers and other experts into school spaces to engage with students, as well as facilitating students to explore different places of work.
- Connect students with “bridging” networks of employers, mentors, youth workers and other supportive adults who can assist them to plan and begin their careers. This is especially important for students whose families cannot easily support them in the local labour market – for example, newly arrived young people.
- Connect students with a wide range of role models working in different professions. There should be a particular emphasis on connecting female students with women working in trades and STEM, and connecting students from culturally diverse backgrounds with professionals from outside of their immediate communities.
- Celebrate successful and rewarding vocational education and training (VET) pathways, and ensure students understand how to navigate the VET sector successfully, and where a quality VET pathway can take you.
- Ensure careers practitioners in schools are appropriately supported with professional development, are qualified to meet Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) standards, have access to real-time data on employment sectors and job markets, and are fully conversant with labour market trends.

To achieve all these things, schools will need strong, ongoing support to create and maintain relationships with diverse stakeholders, including training providers, local employers, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, industry associations, unions and employee associations. Schools cannot be expected to build and manage these relationships and partnerships alone. The role of outside agencies, notably LLENs, will be important.

2. In line with the recommendations of the Young Workers Centre, ensure that secondary students aged 14 and over receive education concerning workplace rights and safety, to strengthen their knowledge and confidence before starting their first jobs. This education should cover awards, rates of pay, enterprise bargaining, workplace bullying, health and safety, workplace disputes, and finding advice and support.
3. Strengthen opportunities for young people at risk of disadvantage to build new connections and “bridging” networks through community participation. Examples include high quality youth leadership initiatives, volunteering, sports, arts and mentoring programs, which link young people to supportive adults outside of their own immediate community and assist them to build confidence, skills and aspirations.
4. Focus especially on strengthening the transitions of students with disability into meaningful and gainful employment, in view of their high vulnerability to poor outcomes. Steps should include:
 - Ensure that students with disability are consistently and equitably included in all career advice and transitional activities.
 - Provide careers’ practitioners with high quality professional development concerning disability and a diverse range of transition options.
 - Implement individualised transition plans for students with disability that address disability-specific barriers to employment, such as discrimination and these students’ frequent lack of part time work experience.
 - Establish school-industry networks to connect students with disability with inclusive employers.
 - Support schools to find accessible work experience placements, internships and other practical learning opportunities for students with disability, with a focus on career goals
 - Monitor the inclusion of students with disability in work experience placements, as well as any connection between the impact of these programs and the young people’s transitions into the workforce.

- Implement transition initiatives for all students that incorporate broader life skills (as described in our international case-study).
 - Ultimately, phase out segregated educational settings. In the interim, ensure greater accountability for the educational outcomes of students in segregated educational settings, for example through formalised curriculums, career advice activities and consistent application of disability standards on education.[†]
5. Ensure careers education is part of regional economic development plans. Support rural and regional communities to map local industries (current and emerging), job growth and job shortages, assess how these issues link to school-to-work transitions and training opportunities and shortages, and resource solutions based on local expertise.
 6. Ensure that the annual *On Track* survey scopes the career advice activities provided to school-leavers, and their satisfaction with this. (The most recent *On Track* publication did not seem to cover this issue.) Students from specialist schools should also be surveyed about this issue.
 7. Ensure career advice activities are informed by the reflections of young adults on the usefulness of the career advice they received in school and how it has related to their subsequent jobs and careers.
 8. Continue to review the curriculum with a view to ensuring students are learning the skills and capacities they will need for the workforce of the future, including skills in creativity, problem solving, communication, digital literacy and financial literacy.

[†] For more detail, please see the submission of YDAS and the Koorie Youth Council to the Inquiry into School to Work Transitions (2017).

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