

Response to Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

1. Examining the relationship between career advice activities and workforce participation of young Victorians.

The extent to which career advice activities influence workforce participation for young Victorians varies depending upon the quality, type of activity, and the social and environmental context in which information, experiences and activities are provided.

There continues to be a trend toward promoting university qualifications as the preferred pathway to employment, when Vocational Education and Training (VET), which focuses on delivering practical and job specific skills, provides excellent outcomes for students and the economy.

Rapid advancements in technology are beginning to dramatically reshape the nation's workforce and change the drivers of employment growth and skills demand. The *Skilling the Current and Next Generation Workforce for a Digital Economy* report (Career and Technical Education Summit, Singapore, March 2017) states that, 'Labour market disruption is accelerating and creating profound implications for employees, job seekers, training providers and companies'. The report asserts that changes are occurring on three fronts:

- Up to 47% of all jobs could be automated in the next decade. Most affected are white collar, systems oriented jobs including accounting and legal roles.
- People will have potentially dozens of jobs and many careers. The idea of training for a single vocation is almost outdated.
- The permanence of employment is changing. New technology platforms are enabling an increasing number of people to move away from traditional employment to more flexible and diversified freelance work options.

Parents and then careers advisors and teachers have the most significant influence on young people's choices about further education and career options. Keeping abreast of current and future trends in employment and work is a challenge for parents, teachers, and schools.

Other factors which impact career advice include: parental influences, school expectations in terms of educational attainment and emphasis placed on VCE results, students perceptions and level of knowledge about particular careers.

Key learnings / opportunities:

- Knowledge and awareness of labour market trends at a local, national and international level are important for providing career advice and supporting transition to employment.
- Raising awareness of the impact of technology and alternative career pathways with parents is vital in gaining support for school based programs.
- The quality of advice provided is varied, and is dependent on personal experience, understanding of labour market trends, and knowledge and understanding of a variety of further education opportunities such as apprenticeships, traineeships, VET and university pathways. Navigating these pathway options and deciding on the best fit for an individual can be complex.

2. Investigating the extent to which career advice activities meet the needs of school leavers.

The provision of career advice varies between schools depending on the resources, time and value placed on these activities within schools and the school curriculum.

In general, career advisors provide meaningful advice. However, they are finding it difficult to keep up with employment and labour market trends and to navigate the increasingly complex training and higher education systems.

Career advisors are also balancing parental and school expectations with student aspirations and capabilities.

There is little consistency across schools, with the amount of time dedicated to career mentoring activities varying greatly. Some schools provide career advisors on a part-time basis (as little as one-hour per week), whilst others provide considerable time allocations. Private schools tend to invest more heavily in providing the additional resources for career advice planning and activities.

Managed Individual Pathways (MIPS) or Career Action Plans (CAPS) are not provided consistently to students and across schools. Career planning discussions need to take place in the early years of secondary school, before subject selection in later years, and revisited each year as the student progresses in their learning and awareness of employment and career opportunities.

Key learnings / opportunities:

- Career planning and advice activities need to be embedded in the school curriculum.
- Multiple work experiences and immersive activities should be provided to allow students (and parents) to make informed decisions about future training and education pathways which lead to employment and a career.
- Instigate MIPS for each student early in their secondary years, and use these as a way to plan and build transferrable skills (soft skills), as well as subject specific knowledge.

3. Examining the challenges advisers face helping young Victorians transition from education to the workforce.

Career advisors face multiple challenges with regard to supporting the transition from education to employment, including:

- A rapidly changing labour market and transitioning economy which is impacting on the entry level jobs available for young people.
- Minimal time allocated within schools for effective career advice planning, one-on-one consultations and to engage with industry to develop awareness raising and immersive industry experiences for students.
- No standard qualification and a lack of structured professional development programs for careers advisors.
- Balancing the expectations of students, parents and the school in advising students of options for further study and employment.
- Lack of student awareness about realities of work and how to get (and keep) a job.
- Perceptions generally about university being the only, or preferred, pathway to a long-term career, when there are many pathway options depending on an individual's aspirations and circumstances (e.g. TAFE training delivers positive employment outcomes for a diverse student cohort).

Key learnings / opportunities:

- Conversations about job and career opportunities need to start early, not just when students need to undertake subject selection in later years of secondary school.
- Provide schools with access to professionally trained and dedicated career advisors who can keep pace with labour market trends, navigate VET and university pathways and provide career support tools for students.
- Invest in ongoing professional development of career advisors and teachers to keep pace with emerging technologies and the impact on the future of work.
- Recognise that liaising meaningfully with industry to provide quality learning experiences takes time and resources to be effective.
- Provide more opportunities for work experience, taster programs and immersion experiences from Year 7 onwards.
- Tailoring support for different student cohorts (e.g. indigenous, students with a disability).

4. Considering strategies to improve the effectiveness of career advice activities for school leavers.

Students today are likely to have many different jobs and careers as they move through their working lives. Promoting resilience and adaptability, highlighting the changing nature of work and stressing the importance of transferable skills will be fundamental to improving the effectiveness of career advice activities.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that student work experience and industry engagement activities are often unplanned and accommodated only if there is an existing employer relationship in place.

Many schools would like to do more to engage with VET, however fitting it into the curriculum can be challenging (e.g. VET in Schools, School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships).

Key learnings / opportunities:

- Specific qualification requirements for career advisors and increased investment in professional development activities for career advisors and teachers.
- Funding support for programs which raise awareness of the diversity of career options and training and employment pathways for young people e.g. Geelong Tertiary Taster program, STEM Manufacturing Futures program (promoting STEM pathways and employment in Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing), Careers in Community Services and Health Taster program.

5. Investigate the career advice needs of young people in regional Victoria and ways to address these needs.

Career advisors and schools in regional areas need to have a detailed understanding of the local economy, as well as national and global trends. It is imperative that advisors have a comprehensive knowledge of their region and access to appropriate data. An appreciation of how advances in digital technologies can facilitate regional jobs growth, and connection nationally and internationally will also be important.

An understanding of the demography of the region is essential to ensure the needs of disadvantaged cohorts are being met. These include but are not limited to: Aboriginal students, refugee students, low SES students (often experiencing inter-generational unemployment) and students with a disability.

Entrepreneurial skills and the ability to innovate and create will be critical to generating the jobs of the future, particularly in regional communities which have smaller and more contained labour markets compared with major metropolitan centres. Providing students with an understanding of how they may create their own career pathway by fostering a culture of entrepreneurship is an important focus for regional and rural schools and their career advisors, and can assist in retaining young people within regions.

The role of TAFE institutes is critical in regional and rural communities. In many areas, TAFE is the only significant training provider. These communities look to TAFEs for a wide range of education and training options to meet local needs and maximise opportunities for young people. There is a need to increase the awareness and understanding of the benefits of TAFE pathway options. Schools, TAFEs and universities could collaboratively develop tailored programs to inform student decision making. Capitalising on services provided by the TAFE network operated Skills and Jobs Centres and programs run by regionally based Tech Schools could be an important focal points for such activities.

6. Exploring what other jurisdictions both in Australia and overseas have in place that could be implemented in Victoria.

Career advisor networks currently operate in each region throughout Victoria. There is opportunity to strengthen the connections between schools and career advisors and the TAFE network operated Skills and Jobs Centres. These centres are run with qualified career advisors and have extensive referral networks and established connections with industry and employers.

Other suggestions include developing a regional pool of qualified career advisors who operate across school clusters. This would enable the provision of consistent and specialised services for students and schools.

While there is learning from overseas, including the often highlighted German and Singaporean experiences, there are excellent local examples to draw upon. In Geelong, a range of initiatives have been delivered under the Skilling the Bay program focused on raising educational attainment levels and enhancing pathways to employment for young people. Programs include: Geelong Tertiary Futures Program, STEM Manufacturing Futures, Girls Leading in Advanced Manufacturing. Details of these and other programs are available on request.

For further information:

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