

Australian Catholic University

Inquiry into Career Advice Activities in Victorian Schools

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ACU Submission

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Executive Summary

Australian Catholic University (ACU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the *Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools* being undertaken by the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee of the Victorian Parliament.

In this submission, ACU emphasises the importance of career advice and its potential to realise the aspirations of young people. However, there are methodological shortcomings with existing career advice, particularly the use of outmoded theoretical models of career development, as well as a lack of institutional support for careers advisers in schools.

Given its potential to improve students' careers, ACU recommends greater government involvement in this area to create more consistent, high-quality provision.

ACU recommends that the Victorian Government:

- 1) Create a Career Development Strategy for all Victorian state secondary schools. A taskforce should be established to develop the strategy, with representation from key stakeholders in industry, education, higher education, employers groups, community groups and subject matter experts.
- 2) Establish a permanent full-time load for appropriately qualified careers adviser roles in all Victorian schools.
- 3) Contribute to the cost of school careers advisers upgrading their qualification to a Master's degree.
- 4) Establish a Victorian Career Development Institute (VCDI) to provide high-quality and accredited professional development for careers advisers working in Victorian schools.
- 5) Provide additional resources to regional schools to fund career development activities, including travel to metropolitan locations.

ACU has well-regarded training programs and internationally recognised experts in career development teaching, in our Faculty of Education and Arts. We would welcome the opportunity to assist the Victorian Government on these issues, particularly the creation of the proposed VCDI.

This submission is organised around the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry.

1) The relationship between career advice activities and workforce participation of young Victorians

There is extensive and consistent evidence that good careers advice has a positive impact on an individual's employment outcomes. Research has shown that, on average:

- participants in a career intervention have a 60 per cent chance of attaining a higher outcome measure than members of a control group who did not participate in the intervention;
- repeated interventions are more effective than one-off interventions;
- group interventions are as effective as individual interventions; and,
- interventions that are facilitated by an expert career development practitioner are more effective than those that are not.¹

In short, career advice, guidance and counselling activities are demonstrably effective practices to enhance the future careers of young Victorians. However, more needs to be done to ensure that future generations are equipped to deal with the unique challenges that they will face in the labour market.

ACU, along with other universities, invests in the education and orientation of secondary school careers advisers by running an annual "Career Practitioner's Day" on our campuses in Melbourne and Ballarat. These events allow careers advisers to learn about the opportunities that different universities offer, and in turn provide advisers with the knowledge and confidence to inform their students, who may not currently aspire to a university education.

In ACU's experience, a competent and committed careers adviser can change the dynamic for these students considerably. Good careers advisers are much more aware of the entry requirements of post-secondary education, including pathway programs, which offer significant opportunities for students who would not otherwise qualify for entry. If competent careers advisers have strong support from their school leadership, students will experience a much broader range of post-secondary options.

There is a strong rationale for providing consistent, high-quality career advice, given its proven capacity to improve students' lives.

¹ Healy, M. (2017). *What is best practice in careers education? An outline of the evidence*. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-best-practice-careers-education-outline-evidence-michael-healy> & Whiston, S. C., Li, Y., Goodrich Mitts, N., & Wright, L. (2017). "Effectiveness of career choice interventions: A meta-analytic replication and extension." *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 100, 175–184.

2) The extent to which career advice activities meet the needs of school leavers

The extent to which career advice activities meet the needs of school leavers can be affected by:

- the institutional support, or lack thereof, given to careers advisers in schools; and,
- the content and nature of the advice provided.

ACU describes these interrelated issues as “institutional” and “methodological” problems that determine the value of career advice.

Institutional problems

ACU Student Recruitment staff are invited to participate in career advice activities within Victorian schools throughout the calendar year. Through this process, ACU obtains a valuable insight into the challenges faced by career advisers at an institutional level, such as:

- *Time and resources* – Many schools have one full-time career teacher and possibly a part-time assistant, insufficient to manage a career development process that commences in Year 7 and continues through Year 12, and one that involves finding work experience places for all Year 10 students, as well as one-on-one appointments with hundreds of students. Many careers advisers also have teaching loads or other responsibilities, which limits the time they can devote to career counselling and may raise questions about whether their main priority lies with teaching or career advice.
- *School policy and focus* – Schools already faced a crowded curriculum, and it can be difficult to find time for career development activities.

There are also factors outside the school’s control that can negatively impact career advice, such as:

- *Demographic change* – the current exponential growth in student numbers means that careers advisers are servicing larger numbers of students, as schools expand in size.² This impacts the ability of careers teachers to take groups of students on excursions to institutions or have longer one-on-one appointments with students.
- *Disengagement of students and parents* – career advice is not compulsory and often not taken up by the students and parents who need it most.
- *Media commentary* – if career outcomes for courses aren’t especially clear, or the media is talking negatively about a profession, these external factors may impact on a student’s decision regarding that career path.

² It has recently been reported that there is “huge demand” in inner-city and sprawling growth corridors and that some Victorian schools “are incredibly overcrowded”; for example, Port Melbourne Primary was built for 300 students but now has almost 820. See Henrietta Cook, “The school sending out rejection letters before it opens,” *The Age*, 28 November 2017.

Methodological problems

ACU's internationally renowned researchers in career development also observe that current careers advice programs frequently fall short, as they are based on outmoded models of career development.³

The most common approach to career programs in schools is to match students' skills, interests and qualifications to available training and job opportunities. This is a very outdated view of the career development service, and has attracted increasingly critical commentary over the last two decades.⁴

"Matching" as a basis for career decisions has been shown repeatedly, in many independent studies, to fail to predict occupational outcomes.⁵ Part of the reason is that the matching approach assumes that a student's skills do not change, that their interests can be accurately discerned from an inventory and that job opportunities do not alter over time. It is an overly simple approach that reinforces rigidity in the individual and, ultimately, in the labour force. For example, it has now been shown that curiosity is a better predictor of work performance than any other personality or ability measure.⁶

A greater emphasis on students dealing successfully with disruption and unplanned change is required for career development advice to better reflect reality. For example, one research project followed 55 school-leavers for 18 months after finishing Year 12. They found 71 per cent reported unplanned changes to their careers after finishing school. A large number (38 per cent) were not doing what they had planned in Term 3 of Year 12. A further 12 per cent reported that they were doing what they planned, but with qualifications such as "later than expected" or at a different employer or university. In other words, around 50 per cent were not doing exactly what they had planned while in the late stages of Year 12.⁷

Teaching students about how to manage career uncertainty has positive outcomes. A recent series of studies at an Australian high school compared traditional career education classes with classes that emphasised unplanned change (what has been called in the literature the "chaos theory of careers"). The traditional classes focussed on strengths, weaknesses, interests and matching occupations, while the chaos-based classes emphasised complexity, change and uncertainty in the world of work. Comparing pre- to post-classes and one month later, the chaos-based classes resulted in uniformly more positive and longer-lasting outcomes than the traditional approach.⁸

A career development strategy should reflect changes in the evidence base in career development and support services, and be designed to foster in students critical qualities: flexibility, curiosity, openness, efficacy, strategy and persistence.⁹ Given the complexities and interdependencies of the

³ For example, see the work of [Professor Jim Bright](#), Professorial Fellow in Career Education and Development, School of Education, ACU.

⁴ See, for example, Amundson, N. (2009). *Active engagement: Enhancing the career counseling process* (3rd ed.). Richmond, BC: Ergon Communications; Arnold, J. (2004). "The congruence problem in John Holland's theory of vocational decisions." *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 77, 95–1; Patton, W. & McMahon, M. (2006). *Career development and systems theory: Connecting theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers; Pryor, R. G. L. & Bright, J. E. H. (2003b). "Order and chaos: A twenty-first century formulation of careers." *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 55(2), 121–128; Pryor, RGL & Bright, JEH (2011). *The Chaos Theory of Careers*. Routledge: New York: USA.

⁵ Arnold, J. (2004), see note 4 above.

⁶ Mussell, P. (2012). "Introducing the construct curiosity for predicting job performance." *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, DOI: 10.1002/job.1809

⁷ Borg, T., Bright, JEH & Pryor, RGL. (2014). "High School Students - Complexity, Change and Chance: Do the key concepts of the Chaos Theory of Careers apply?" *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 23(1), 22-28.

⁸ Borg (2016), unpublished PhD thesis.

⁹ Pryor & Bright (2011), see note 4 above.

21st century labour market, uncertainty and chance events are central to the experience of most workers and should be incorporated in career advice methodology to not only inform, but to transform as well.¹⁰

Recommendation: That the Victorian Government create a Career Development Strategy for all Victorian state secondary schools. A taskforce should be established to develop the strategy, with representation from key stakeholders in industry, education, higher education, employers groups, community groups and subject matter experts. The strategy should address the needs of Victorian students across their working lives and recognise the importance of skilling students for lifelong career development.

3) The challenges advisers face helping young Victorians transition from education to the workforce

Variable outcomes

ACU's careers advisers, who provide our Career Development Service, offer anecdotal evidence that the experience of career education in secondary schools appears to be very mixed. A few students talk about the excellent advice and assistance they received in senior high school from their career teacher; the work experience opportunities that they could access; and the chance they had to hear presentations at school from people in various professions.

However, our staff report that it is more common to hear from students about the *lack* of support they received in gaining an insight into career opportunities, or into their particular strengths or interests - or the reality of unplanned changes and unexpected outcomes post-school. University students often speak of how their high school careers adviser was either juggling the role with a teaching load, or was only able to offer a brief consultation with interested students because they did not have enough time available or had too many students to service.

Careers adviser as a full-time role

In Victorian schools, the ratio of careers advisers to students is regularly over 1:1000, creating a very challenging workload. Career education also does not appear to have very high "status" in many schools; it has been informally reported to ACU that the role is not considered a good career move for ambitious teachers wishing to develop their teaching career. As a result, there tends to be a high turnover in this role in many schools, and the person holding the position is unlikely to be able to influence school policy on careers advisory activities. While a dedicated school principal can change this approach quite quickly, greater consistency is required across all secondary schools.

In particular, many schools do not have a careers adviser with a full-time position in career development. For many years, New South Wales schools have supported a full-time, full load

¹⁰ Bright, J. E. H., Pryor, R. G. L. & Harpham, L. (2005). "The role of chance events in career decision making." *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 66, 561–576; Bright, J. E. H., Pryor, R. G. L., Chan, E. & Rijanto, J. (2009). "The dimensions of chance career episodes." *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75(1), 14–25. See also Bright, J. E. H. & Pryor, R. G. L. (2008). "Shiftwork: A Chaos Theory of Careers agenda for change in career counselling." *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 17(3), 63–72.

position of careers adviser in all government schools. We recommend that this policy be adopted in Victoria.

Recommendation: That the Victorian Government establish a permanent full-time load for appropriately qualified careers adviser roles in all Victorian schools.

Training and professional development

The current national minimum standard for Career Development Professionals is a specialist Graduate Certificate recognised by the Career Industry Council of Australia. People who wish to become a careers adviser in schools must complete this approved postgraduate program.

ACU accepts the minimum standard established by the national professional body for careers advisers. However, we recommend the Victorian Government encourage school careers advisers to upgrade their qualification to a Master's degree. This is because of the high-level skills required in the role: above all, counselling; the ability to interpret and provide guidance related to complex and changing labour market information; and the ability to self-evaluate their practices.

Counselling is a particularly important aspect of career development work. A reasonable parallel might be found in psychology, where it is the case that some clients are capable of benefiting solely from information, some others require intensive support, but the majority require some level of face-to-face service. The same applies in terms of career advice, where counselling to individuals is a complex yet essential task.

Recommendation: That the Victorian Government contribute to the cost of school careers advisers upgrading their qualification to a Master's degree.

Often teachers are so preoccupied with administrative matters that there is insufficient time for any effective professional development work. Despite the challenges and complexity of the role, the current provision of professional development for careers teachers is fragmented and piecemeal.

ACU proposes that a Victorian Career Development Institute (VCDI) be established that involves leading career development researchers. Such an Institute could conduct research into Victorian career development and labour market issues, as well as provide advanced and targeted training for Victorian teachers with career development responsibilities. The VCDI would also be well-placed to research the needs of young people in regional Victoria.

The VCDI could be established in partnership with one or more tertiary education providers, to ensure access to best-practice information and methods, and to defray costs.

Recommendation: That the Victorian Government establish a Victorian Career Development Institute (VCDI) to provide high-quality and accredited professional development for careers advisers working in Victorian schools.

4) Strategies to improve the effectiveness of career advice activities for school leavers

The recommendations offered throughout this submission and summarised in the Executive Summary are the strategies ACU proposes.

5) The career advice needs of young people in regional Victoria and ways to address these needs

In ACU's experience, regional students often require more career advice and support than students in metropolitan areas. This is due to the socio-economic challenges that exist in some regional and remote communities and the difficulties that arise from being removed from services such as transportation and tertiary education.

Students in these communities also are often not exposed to higher education within their families, peer groups or in schools. Due to these factors, regional students need more structured exposure to the further education opportunities available in both regional and metropolitan areas, in order to make informed decisions about their future careers.

Recommendation: That the Victorian Government provide additional resources to regional schools to fund career development activities, including travel to metropolitan locations.

6) What do other jurisdictions, both in Australia and overseas, have in place that could be implemented in Victoria?

Some training courses for careers advisers in Victorian schools continue to rely too heavily on foreign textbooks and materials. There is significant internationally-recognised research and publishing on career development by Australian authors, including substantial amounts of evaluation data collected in Australian (including Victorian) schools.

Australia has led the way in the development of new approaches to Career Development theory. Of the three major new approaches of the last 20 years (Career Construction Theory, Systems Theory Framework and the Chaos Theory of Careers) – two of them – Systems Theory Framework¹¹ and The Chaos Theory of Careers¹² have been developed in Australia.

¹¹ McMahon, M. & Patton, W. (1995). "Development of a systems theory framework of career development." *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 4, 81–88. & Patton, W. & McMahon, M. (2006). *Career development and systems theory: Connecting theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

¹² Pryor, R. G. L. & Bright, J. E. H. (2003a). "The chaos theory of careers." *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 12(2), 12–20; Pryor, R. G. L. & Bright, J. E. H. (2003b). "Order and chaos: A twenty-first century formulation of careers." *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 55(2), 121–128; Pryor, RGL & Bright, JEH (2011). *The Chaos Theory of Careers*. Routledge: New York: USA.

Greater use should be made of the models, frameworks and practices that have been developed and empirically proven locally.

There is a range of ideas and initiatives that could be usefully adapted and adopted from interstate and overseas, but the Inquiry should not ignore significant local work that is having an international impact.

APPENDIX A: AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY PROFILE

Australian Catholic University (ACU) is a publicly-funded Catholic university, open to people of all faiths and of none and with teaching, learning and research inspired by 2,000 years of Catholic intellectual tradition. ACU operates as a multi-jurisdictional university with seven campuses across four states and one territory. ACU campuses are located in North Sydney (NSW), Strathfield (NSW), Canberra (ACT), Melbourne (Victoria), Ballarat (Victoria), Brisbane (QLD) and Adelaide (SA).

ACU is the largest Catholic university in the English-speaking world. Today, ACU has more than 33,000 students and 2,300 staff.¹³

ACU graduates demonstrate high standards of professional excellence and are also socially responsible, highly employable and committed to active and responsive learning. ACU graduates are highly sought-after by employers, with a 94 per cent employment rate.¹⁴

ACU has built its reputation in the areas of Health and Education and is a major producer of nursing and teaching graduates in Australia. ACU educates the largest number of undergraduate nursing and teaching students in Australia,¹⁵ serving to meet significant workforce needs in these areas. Under the demand driven system, ACU has sought to focus and build on these strengths.

Since 2014, ACU has had four faculties: Health Services; Education and Arts; Law and Business; and Theology and Philosophy. The consolidation of the previous six faculties has created a more efficient and competitive structure focused on the needs of industry and employment partners. ACU is also moving towards the adoption of a shared services model where suitable, to improve efficiencies, internal processes and better allocate resources.

ACU is committed to targeted and quality research. ACU's strategic plan focuses on areas that align with ACU's mission and reflect most of its learning and teaching: Education; Health and Wellbeing; Theology and Philosophy; and Social Justice and the Common Good. To underpin its plan for research intensification, ACU has appointed high profile leaders to assume the directorships, and work with high calibre members, in seven research institutes.¹⁶

In the last few years, the quality of ACU's research has improved dramatically. In the 2015 Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) assessment ACU received high scores in the fields of research identified as strategic priorities and in which it has concentrated investment in order to achieve the highest levels of excellence. These include selected areas of Health, as well as Education, Psychology, Theology, and Philosophy.

ACU's research in Psychology, Human Movement and Sports Science, Nursing, Public Health and Health Services is rated in the top category under ERA of being "well above world standard".

ACU's research in Specialist Studies in Education, Philosophy and Religion and Religious Studies is in the next ERA category as being above world standard.

¹³ Student numbers refer to headcount figures while staff numbers refer to full-time equivalent (FTE).

¹⁴ Based on those available for full-time employment, results from the *Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) 2016*.

¹⁵ Department of Education and Training, *2014 Higher Education Data Collection – Students, Special Courses* (31 July 2015) <<https://docs.education.gov.au/node/38139>>.

¹⁶ Australian Catholic University, *ACU Research* <http://www.acu.edu.au/research/research_institutes_and_programs>.

ACU's research in Education Studies in Human Society, Law and Legal Studies, History and Archaeology, Education Systems, Curriculum and Pedagogy, Business and Management, Political Science, Sociology, Law, Applied Ethics and Historical Studies is at world standard.