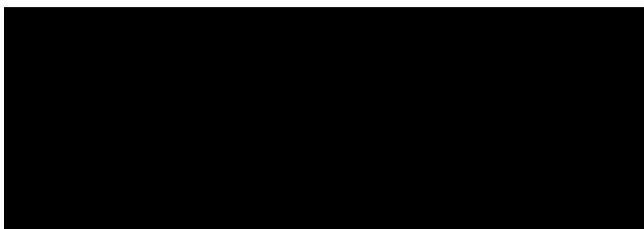




Parliamentary inquiry into careers advice in Victorian schools
National Disability Coordination Officer Program
December 2017

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Victorian NDCO State Network



Introduction

The Federal Department of Education and Training funds the National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) program. NDCOs work strategically to assist people with disability (15-64 years) access and participate in, tertiary education and subsequent employment through a national network of NDCOs. NDCOs work strategically with stakeholders (including Secondary Schools) in each region to reduce barriers to participation, help smooth transitions, build links and coordinate services for people with disability between education, training and employment. There are 31 NDCO's across Australia, and seven located within Victoria:

- Inner and Northern Melbourne Region 11 - Ramona Mandy
- Western Melbourne Region 12 – Erin O’Grady
- Eastern Melbourne Region 13 - Rayce Coyte
- Southern Melbourne Region 14 - Sally Bailey
- Northern Victoria Region 15 - Mark Cottee
- Western Victoria Region 16 - Pam Anderson
- Eastern Victoria & Outer South East Region 17 - Andrea Evans-McCall

The NDCO program adopts The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) definition of disability. Under this legislation is exceptionally broad. It may be in relation to a person’s intellectual, physical, sensory, mental health, learning, behaviour and /or medical need or condition. Under the definition the disability may presently exist, may have previously existed but no longer exist, may exist in the future or is imputed to the person.

Our response is on behalf of young people with disability, careers practitioners and the broader community that we support.

1. The relationship between school career advice and youth employment outcomes

All people are people first, and all have needs and rights. Everyone wants to enjoy life, to feel productive and secure. Employment is a very important part of life with numerous benefits including becoming participants and contributing members of the community. School career advisers need to take the role of an advocate for students with disability, working to remove the barriers to employment that students with disability face.

Young people with disability are not transitioning into employment at the same rate as their peers without a disability:

- 30 percent of people with a disability do not go beyond Year 10, compared to 20 per cent of people without a disability;¹
- 36 percent of people aged 15 to 64 years with reported disability had completed Year 12 compared to 60 per cent of people without a disability;²
- 15 percent of people aged 15 to 64 years with disability had completed a bachelor degree or higher compared to 26 percent of people without disability;³
- 38 percent of young people aged 15 to 24 years with disability either work, study, or do a combination of both on a full time basis compared to 56 per cent of young people without disability;⁴

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013.

² Ibid.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012c

- 42 percent of young people with disability neither work nor study (there is no comparative data available for young people without disability);⁵
- 20 percent of young people with disability either work or study on a part time basis (there is no comparative data available for young people without disability);⁶
- People with disability in Australia are only half (50 per cent) as likely to be employed as people without disability;⁷ and
- 45 percent of people with disability in Australia live in or near poverty.⁸

The senior school years leading up to post school transition is an important period in the lives of all young people. It is crucial that young people with disability receive quality career advice and support to enable them to pursue meaningful post school options. This is particularly important for young people with intellectual disability, as Siperstein, Parker & Drascher (2013) state that *“if young people with significant disability do not engage in mainstream employment by age 21, it is unlikely that they ever will”*.⁹ Not all young people with disability are receiving the quality and relevant career advice required to enable a successful post school transition, as such their transition experiences are poor, which results in low participation in employment and tertiary study¹⁰. The Youth Action Policy Paper (2017) also identified that *“In 2009, Australia was ranked 21st out of 29 OECD countries in employment participation rates for people living with a disability, with 45% of those living near or below the poverty line”*¹¹ (P.36.) Thus, poor post-school transition and preparation is a key factor that influences the low employment rates of people with disability.

School is where the post-school transition process occurs. The quality of the career advice to support transition planning however often significantly affects the success of this transition. Some young people with disability feel very strongly that the lack of school career advice and post school support has influenced their experiences. In the following are quotes from participants in the Children with Disability Australia, Post School Transition: The Experience of Students with Disability:

- *“They didn’t know what to do with special needs kids. We got left out.”*
- *“I feel stranded. I don’t think I have a future.”*
- *“I was never encouraged to achieve and found that expectations were very low for me. It was therefore entirely up to me to achieve what I have”*
- *“Career planning in Years 10 and 11 was quite minimal and tokenistic. There was nothing in particular that prepared me as a student with disability.”*
- *“I left school due to breaches of the Disability Discrimination Act. I had no access to career planning and was too distressed for years to be able to plan.”*¹²(p.7)

Career development needs to start early in order to raise young people’s aspirations and address the assumptions and expectations around career opportunities for this cohort. Career exploration should be conducted through a strength-based approach focusing on positive achievements; what the individual can do rather than perceived or actual deficiencies. The benefits of this approach include *“increased engagement with education, improved employment prospects and an increase in social capital and wellbeing”* (p. 8)¹³. However, *“approximately 50% of schools in Australia (with populations of over a 1000 students) dedicate less than \$3 per student for career guidance”*¹⁴ (p.8).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2012a.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Siperstein, G, Parker, R & Drascher, M (2013), 'National snapshot of adults with intellectual disabilities in the labor force', Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, vol.39, no.3, pp.1-27.

¹⁰ Children with Disability Australia (2016) Post School Transition: The Experience of Students with Disability.

¹¹ Youth Action Policy Paper (2017). Career Guidance: The Missing Link In School To Work Transition (p. 36.)

¹² Children with Disability Australia (2016) Post School Transition: The Experiences of Students with Disability

¹³ Youth Action Policy Paper (2017). Career Guidance The Missing Link In School To Work Transition

¹⁴ Career Industry Council of Australia, A snapshot of career practitioners in Australia, CICA, 2015

There is a growing awareness of the benefit of transition planning. Wehman, Sima, Ketchun, West, Chan and Leuking (2015) found that the education and employment outcomes of students with disabilities were influenced by the student's self-perception, the perceptions of key supports such as their families, schools and social circles. Furthermore, the authors note that employment experiences in high school and parental expectations of post-high school employment were strong predictors of post school employment.¹⁵ When transition planning takes a holistic approach and involves a set of coordinated activities focusing on individual strengths and interests within and outside of the education setting which is more beneficial to the young person with disability.

NDCO roles in Victoria have worked to build capacity, linkages and models in the development of transition practises and have provided career advisors across the state with a range of resources, facilitated student/parent focused career expos (community linkages), projects and programs. The uptake by schools to attend such support opportunities is by choice and the levels of partnerships and encouragement by the Department of Education varies across the state. The NDCO activities enhance transition planning processes, which *Hatfield, Ciccarelli, Falkmer and Falkmer (2017) have highlighted as key to improved self-determination, increased rates of employment, enhanced success in post-secondary settings as well as greater overall happiness and community participation, particularly for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder*¹⁶.

In 2014, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Student Inclusion and Engagement division released the guide "Strengthening Pathways Planning", which prepares young people with disabilities for successful futures beyond school. NDCOs worked very closely with the existing Regional Career Development Officers (RCDO's) to deliver professional development across Victoria to career advisers to support the implementation of the guide. The guide outlines the key practises to create successful student transitions and has supporting resources: Engaging Parents in Career Conversations, RU Ready student profiles and outlining the need for workplace opportunities. This guide and support resources is still available on the Department of Education and Training's website, however the guide has not been updated since first published in 2014 and the department has provided no further opportunities for support to implement these initiatives in light of the consistent turnover of careers advisors in Victorian schools. The Victorian NDCOs recommend a stronger collaboration between the NDCO program and the Department of Education and Training to ameliorate the impact that the loss of Regional Careers Development Officers and subsequent initiatives has had on careers advice in schools.

2. How well current career advice programs meet the needs of school leavers

All education providers in Australia are obligated to comply with the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and its subordinate legislation the Disability Standards for Education (2005) to ensure that students with a disability are able to access and participate in education activities on the same basis as all other students. These obligations also apply to educational support for post school transition, when most young people face a range of adjustments and challenges as they expect to take on adult roles and responsibilities.

¹⁵ Wehman, Sima, Ketchun, West, Chan and Leuking (2014) 'Predictors of Successful Transition from School to Employment for Youth with Disabilities' *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*.

¹⁶ Hatfield, m, Falkmer, M., Falkmer, T & Ciccarelli, M (2017) Effectiveness of the BOOST-A™ online transition planning program for adolescents on the autism spectrum: A quasi-randomized controlled trial, *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*.

Often career practitioners struggle to remain abreast of the full range of career and employment options for students with disability. Thus, the pathways that students with disability undertake depend heavily on the level of knowledge and support that the careers practitioner receives in order to meet these students' needs. It is also concerning that although many careers practitioners experience a lack of resourcing and knowledge; a significant barrier to meeting the student's needs is the culture of low expectations. According to Children with Disability Australia (2016), discriminatory and negative attitudes regarding students and young people with disability are prevalent throughout the post-school transition process and identified as the key barrier to effective post school transition.¹⁷

The NDCO program has the unique position of being able to respond to gaps and barriers that careers practitioners and students with disability face when transitioning to further education and employment. In the following is a series of examples highlighting how to strengthen careers advice programs and networks.

In 2015, the NDCO for region 17 set up the Learn and Share Network a careers best Practice network to build the specialist schools capacity in transition-focused education. The aim of the 'Learn and Share Network' was to bring together colleagues with common goals to explore ways of working, identify common solutions and share best practice and ideas. There are four networks across the NDCO region 17 where Career Practitioners in mainstream Government, Catholic and Independent Schools come together to promote best practice in career development. It came to the attention of the NDCO for region 17 that representatives from the seven Specialist Schools in region 17 did not attend these meetings. The NDCO saw the need for a best practise network where the specialist schools could come together and learn and share from one another.

Another noteworthy network is the North-Western Melbourne 'Specialist School Transition Network'¹⁸. This network is for career and transition staff from specialist schools in the North and West metropolitan region of Melbourne. The members come together to share information and resources to support young people with disabilities to pursue post school options that include further education and training, employment and leisure based activities in their local community. This network is self-governed and is a key point of communication and support for careers practitioners across these regions.

¹⁷ Children with Disability Australia (2015) Post School Transition: The Experiences of Students with Disability

¹⁸ Community Transition Support. Sourced: <http://nwcts.org.au/specialist-school-transition-network/>

In Table 1, we have outlined the range of career development activities the NDCO program deliver. The activities are based on the Kohler’s Taxonomy Categories¹⁹, which provides an organisational framework for the examination of individual school to post-school transition practices.

Table 1.

Kohlers Taxonom	Student-focused planning	Student development		Program structure	Family involvement	Interagency collaboration	
	Aspiration Raising	Post School Transition Expos	Work Readiness Programs	Professional Development	Parent Engagement	Networks	Newsletters
NDCO Activities	Victorian NDCO Website	Post school option pathway information sessions directed towards teachers, support teachers, parents and careers	Passport 2 Employment	‘Enhancing the Links’ workshops for careers practitioners	Parents As Career Transition Support (PACT’s)	Career Networks	Quarterly newsletter with targeted facts, figures and posts on topics that will provide professional learning
	YDAS self-advocacy sessions NDIS readiness		Careers Access Program	Biannual Inclusive Learning Conference	Post school option pathway information sessions directed towards teachers, support teachers, parents and carers	Disability Transition Networks	Social Media posts targeted facts, figures and posts on topics that will provide professional learning
	Inspiring Young People with a Disability events			Creating Confidence careers for students	Engaging Parents in Career Conversations	Ticket To Work Partnerships	

¹⁹ Paula D. Kohler, Sharon Field (2003) Transition-Focused Education: Foundation for the Future. *The Journal of Special Education*. Vol. 37/No. 3/2003/Pp. 174–183

				with disability			
	Student Transition Guides Post School Options Guides			Assistive technology workshops specifically for teachers and aides.		Learn and Share Network	
	Youth Empowerment Program Camps for P2E graduates			Creating Confidence - Working with people with disability			
National NDCO resources	Get Ready for Study and Work						

Table 2 describes current NDCO activities that support career development in schools.

Table 2.

Name of Program	Description
Passport 2 Employment (P2E)	Passport 2 Employment (P2E) program is a work readiness program. The aim of the program is to further participant's knowledge, skills and opportunities for employment, further education and/or training. The participants are young people with disability or multiple learning barriers from the local Secondary Colleges and Specialist Schools.
Parents As Career Transition Support (PACTS)	Parents As Career Transition Support (PACTS) co facilitated careers and pathways information sessions for parents of students with disability
Creating Confidence - Career development for students with disability	Careers development sessions for careers advisers and professionals working with people with disability in exploring career pathways, combining career development, and disability theory and career development practice with reasonable adjustment and assistive technology.
Creating Confidence - Working with people with disability	Tailored disability awareness sessions for employers this workshop guides participants through the experiences of people with disability on their pathway to employment and includes a legal framework, reasonable adjustments and explanation of disability types and learning needs.
Enhancing the Links	Tailor-made workshops focusing on student transitions from school to further education and employment. These workshops bring mainstream and special schools together to share best practice and understand pathway options for young people with disability.

Inspiring Young People with a Disability events	The aim of the 'Inspiring Young People with a Disability' event is to raise expectations about the potential for people with disability including individuals, stakeholders and employers. Participants are provided with an opportunity to hear information about their rights, entitlements, supports available, educational options and pathways.
Careers Access Program	Career education program tailored to students with disability, includes - Ticket To Work Partnership
Ticket To Work Partnership's	School focused partnerships that collaborate to provide careers and pathways opportunities for students with disability.
Networks	The NDCO program maintains representation on networks to provide support and deliver professional development in relation to the inclusion and transition of PWD in tertiary education and employment

3. The challenges faced by school career advisors

The NDCO program has observed numerous challenges faced by school career advisors in supporting students with disability. These include finding suitable work experience activities; inconsistent support from the Department of Education and Training; difficulty navigating post school options and meeting the specific needs of students with disability.

There are some distinct challenges in regards to finding suitable work experience for students with disability in special schools and mainstream settings. In the special school environment, industry engagement to host students is problematic and in many instances does not occur. For the schools that are doing well in this area it is a result of solid collaborations with external community service networks, either sourced independently by the school or through the Local Learning Employment Network 'Structured Workplace Learning' program. Additionally, contextualised versions of The Smith Family 'Work Inspirations'²⁰ program has also been effective in meeting this need. In mainstream schools, the NDCO experience is that a majority of these students struggle to find placement via the schools networks and the responsibility of finding an appropriate host will often fall within the network of the family. Whilst this a suitable outcome in many cases there are instances where the placement is not necessarily based on a good job exposure environment or in line with the career aspirations of the individual student. For those families with limited network options it is quite common that the individual student will not undertake any work experience at all during their schooling life.

As NDCOs, we work closely with careers practitioners across mainstream, alternative and special schools. This work consists of providing transition information, delivering professional learning events and supporting established or creating new careers networks. We receive continual feedback about the lack of knowledge and support for career advisors in relation to how to assist a student with disability with life after school and career development. This gap of knowledge is critical as it affects the student's educational engagement and participation in the community.²¹ This was prevalent with feedback from the Enhancing Links Network (an NDCO initiated event), with one particular practitioner from a mainstream secondary school in Western Melbourne stating, *"I just don't know what to do with her, there is no where she could fit. I don't know how to handle her*

²⁰ The Smith Family. Sourced: <https://www.thsmithfamily.com.au/programs/work-experience/work-inspiration>

²¹ Youth Action Policy Paper (2017). Career Guidance: The Missing Link In School To Work Transition (p. 36.)

disability and could not see her participating in any workplace". Statements such as this are concerning and indicates the need for more support for practitioners in this crucial role.

The NDCO program have also observed the impact that the removal of Regional Career Development Officers (RCDO) has had on careers practitioners. This occurred in December 2014. The RCDOs provided a range of supports to careers practitioners across the state. This included;

- Professional Learning across a range of areas, which included how to support students with disability through a strength-based approach to career development (Guiding Circles).
- Establishment of networks which are practitioner managed and based on the needs of members
- Benchmarking tools to assist with advocating for quality career development in schools i.e. emphasising the importance of qualified practitioners, time and resource allocation to career development, effective data collection methods and assessment of relationships with families and other stakeholders.
- The Engaging Parents in Career Conversations toolkit was also very useful as schools have become increasingly aware of the role parents and carers have on the outcomes of the young person's career journey.

Unfortunately, the abovementioned supports and resources have either ceased, or are in need of updating. The NDCO program welcomes further discussion with the Department of Education about how these initiatives could be maintained.

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

Early intervention is the key. It is crucial that young people with disability receive the support required to participate in the workforce as early as possible to drive effective long-term employment and maximise the benefits of improved standards of living and social inclusion that come with employment²²²³. By implementing targeted approaches that priorities young people who experience disadvantage, we supporting these students to experience success in the transition to further study and employment²⁴.

Career planning for students with disability must integrate career development in all aspects of school learning. The NDCO program suggest a range of strategies that could improve the effectiveness of career advice activities for school leavers with disability.

The following suggestions for career development practices in schools have been sources from Children with Disability Australia (2016)²⁵ and the Youth Action Policy Paper (2017)²⁶:

- a. Career development activities to take place in the early years of schooling
- b. Transition planning to begin early i.e. by Year 9
- c. Planning to be person-centred i.e. tailored support that explores individual students' interests, skills, strengths and potential barriers to gaining employment
- d. Parental/guardian involvement and partnerships with community organisations to support the diverse needs and aspirations of young people.
- e. High expectations embedded throughout the process

²² National Disability Services (2011) Inquiry into school to work transition: Submission to the Standing Committee on Employment Education and Training.

²³ Deloitte Access Economics (2011) The economic benefits of increasing employment for people with disability, Australian Network on Disability.

²⁴ Youth Action Policy Paper (2017). Career Guidance The Missing Link In School To Work Transition

²⁵ Children with Disability Australia (2015) Post School Transition: The Experiences of Students with Disability

²⁶ Youth Action Policy Paper (2017). Career Guidance: The Missing Link In School To Work Transition

- f. Work experience opportunities and the facilitation of part time work — connections with local businesses and employers will be essential as this deepens student's understanding of career pathways and planning i.e. Ticket to Work initiative²⁷
- g. Resourcing for staff to provide adequate services to students, funding to support the ongoing building of staff skills, and the monitoring and evaluation of quality provision.
- h. Foundational skills to be addressed i.e. NDCO Project: Passport 2 Employment

The NDCO program also recommend that schools develop relationships with local and regional businesses. This approach not only benefits the student but teachers, parents, employees, schools and wider community also benefit from such relationships²⁸. Thus, existing programs in the school curriculum like work experience, apprenticeship, traineeships, and work-readiness programs i.e. job interview skills are enhanced by the strong school-business relationships.

5. Specific career advice needs of young people in regional Victoria and how to address them

NDCOs covering regional Victoria attend many forums, meetings and round table events as part of their role supporting educational transitions in those locations. From this, region 15 observes the most commonly raised issue is access to cost effective and efficient transport, limited career opportunities and low aspiration among the community. This is supported by the Youth Action Policy Paper, who states that *"distance imposes greater costs to access services, education and employment, often requiring lengthy travel and relocation"* (p. 6) and they continue, *"Young people from rural and remote areas also face barriers such as limited exposure to different careers and a limited number of universities and Vocational and Educational Training (VET) institutions in or close to their hometowns"* (p. 118)

There is an additional impact when it comes to students with disability as a further disadvantaged subset to this issue. *There is a higher proportion of people (15-64 years old) with impairment living in regional areas than in major cities (18% to 13%)²⁹. This suggest that we should see a higher proportion of students with impairment from regional areas attending university when viewed as a proportion of the student population. However, 2% of people with impairment living in a regional or remote area are currently studying in higher education, compared with 4% of people with disability living in a major city (ABS, 2012)³⁰ (Coyle et al, 2016).*

An important point to make is the importance of size and type of school which has an influence regrading this question and the impacts of 'being regional'. Most major centres do quite well regionally due to the fact that a lot of support services are located in these towns and as such, the element of being regional is reduced as a factor. However you do not have to travel far from these regional centres to find community networks limited. *"In small and remote communities, purchasing or sourcing specialised services from a provider is often impacted by availability and timeliness as well as cost per service unit. The Federal Government discussion paper (2017) acknowledge that "this can result in long delays between the identification of particular learning support needs and the commencement of interventions and programs to deal with them"*³¹(p. 41).

This reality has flow-on effects with all other aspects of the curriculum pressures, of which career aspirations is one. Size and type of school also has impacts from a diversity, depth of skills and knowledge point of view given that teachers in these school communities will often have to cover

²⁷ National Disability Services, Ticket to Work. Sourced: <http://www.tickettowork.org.au/who-we-are/>

²⁸ ACER (2011) Final Report on school-business relationships

²⁹ ABS, 2012

³⁰ Coyle et al, 2016 (Presented by Dr Jenene Bourke at Southern Higher Education Network, Dec 2017)

³¹Federal Government Department of Education (2017) Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote education - Discussion paper.

many different roles without necessarily the supports from additional staff to support them in their professional and personal development.

Most recently, the NDCO from region 15 attended a VET round table forum hosted by Federal Ministers, the Hon Cathy McGowan and the Hon Karen Andrews in Wodonga on the 2nd May 2017. Whilst the theme of the event was 'Vocational Education on the Border' there were several recommendations proposed from attendees that link to the regional aspect of this inquiry:

A: the current model of funding for VET in School (VETIS);

- To offer incentives to secondary schools to increase the number of VET subjects available to learners to meet local industry and student needs.

B: Limitations of VET pathways for learners;

- Remove funding barriers to enable learners to move between schools, TAFE, RTO's and e-VET providers in order to access the pathways relevant to their area of interest.
- Licensing, accreditation and qualifications to be considered at a National standard.
- Develop industry partnerships that enable secondment opportunities for secondary level teachers to maintain currency, especially for rural and regional teachers.

C: Poor VET profile in the school and general community;

- Enable early exposure and access to experiential learning in workplaces that showcase local and diverse career options.

D: Limited, or university-centric, career advice;

- The career advisory role in secondary school be filled by non-teaching, industry informed, and external (neutral) providers.
- Introduce contemporary career discussions at an earlier age.
- Progress career design-development discussions to include all training opportunities and employment markets.

E: Limited social and personal supports for learners (lack of financial resources, transport, healthy role models, and presence of an 'at-risk' status).

- Investment in 'wrap-around' services and policies that promote collaborative delivery of external services to address sustainable pathways for vulnerable and disengaged young people.

F: Complexity of education and employment pathways;

- Centralised point to access VET career information, agency and service contacts.
- This access is made available to young people outside of the school networks.

In closing, in the context of students with a disability, it should be noted that there currently appears to be no immediate solution to accessing services or transport that could address some of these issues via the introduction of the NDIS.