



**Submission from the Northern Melbourne VET Cluster (self funded by member schools) and the South East VET Cluster (partly funded by the S.E.LLEN and member schools)**

**To the Victorian Parliament Inquiry into Career Advice**

**Please consider the following response which has had input from a number of VET Coordinators in both Clusters.**

**There are 45 member schools, both Government and Non Government in the Northern Melbourne VET Cluster and a similar number in the South East VET Cluster.**

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

The strength and value of school career advice is strongly linked to the staffing, effectiveness, status of and commitment to Career Programs in schools. Career advice is one of many important components within the Careers and Pathways Program at a school and should not be the only Careers activity, like any transition, it should be a process, not an event. In many Government schools, Career Advice has been inadequate for many years because of its dependence on and focus of individual teachers. Careers advice given to students who have not been adequately prepared to receive it is often inappropriate and ineffective. Schools should give Career Education a prominent place within their curriculum, staffed appropriately, with Career Education beginning in the junior school and being an important part of the curriculum at every year level. If this was the case, then by the time students have specific Careers Course Counselling/Course Selection at Years 9, 10 and 11, the students would be well informed about the choices they can make and their eventual employment outcomes are more likely to be positive.

Career Advice is best built into the educational process, embedded deeply into the curriculum at all levels. Fundamentally, the best Career Advice for secondary students comes from 'Doing' in both a practical and theoretical sense. A long term commitment to the growth and support (budgetary and philosophical ) of VET/VCAL options and relative teaching expertise and development is essential. Students who participate in Work Experience (W.E.), VET Programs, Structured Workplace Learning (SWL) and School Based Apprenticeships & Traineeships (SBATs) are receiving the most appropriate life experiences to inform their future Career and Pathway Planning. Vocational Education opportunities are crucial in assisting secondary students to learn about the world of work, developing industry specific and workplace skills and to trial possible career pathways. The data

indicates that students who participate in Vocational Education & Training have enhanced youth employment outcomes.

Unfortunately, there has been massive under and reduction in funding in these areas. An example of this is the withdrawal of the funding which used to be available for VCAL Coordination in schools.

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

School leavers have diverse needs and should be presented with a range of information and be provided with access to a broad range of pathways. In Government schools, there is no incentive for schools to staff the Careers and Pathways area with qualified teachers and give them the appropriate time allowances to do their jobs effectively. Unfortunately, Principals in Government Schools are not always knowledgeable about the importance of the Careers Pathways area and therefore may not support it from a financial and budgetary perspective. They do not always understand or value the vocational education opportunities which may be available to their students as they are often likely to be more focussed on the academic VCE pathway. Vocational Education and Training opportunities and related Career Advice remain poor cousins because Secondary Education remains captive to the achievement of ATAR and acceptance into University placements. Government schools have been under increasing financial pressure and many Principals have chosen to save money by cutting back in the Careers and Pathways area.

The following is a list of the trends which have resulted from this practice:

- Careers Education, embedded into the curriculum at all Year levels is almost non-existent in many schools. This is despite the introduction and roll out of the Career's Curriculum Framework. However, there are many very dedicated people working around the current limitations to provide the best Career Advice they can.
- Fewer staff are being allocated in Careers and Pathways Departments in schools and less likely to be full-time.
- VIT registered Teaching Staff in Careers and Pathways Departments are more likely to be part-time, more likely to have very little experience in this area, and often likely to have considerable teaching loads as well. There should be a full-time 'presence' in the Careers context, just as there should be in other areas such as wellbeing, which is another under-resourced area. It is very important that some staff in the Careers Pathways Departments in schools are VIT registered Teaching Staff so that they can be qualified to teach Careers related curriculum in the classroom and take on the relevant duty of care of classroom management.
- Staff in Careers and Pathways Departments are increasingly more likely to be ES staff who are often on a lower pay scale than VIT registered teachers. Many have little experience or knowledge of this area. However, it also has to be acknowledged that many ES staff have careers qualifications to Post Grad level and have come from a non-teaching background with a highly valuable knowledge of industry and the labour market. In addition, numerous staff working as ES in this role are VIT registered teachers with years of experience in the classroom, but not able to make full use of their capacity as teachers due to limitations enforced by the ES categorisation. Unfortunately, schools often opt to pay low salaries to staff doing this important role, not acknowledging its importance in student outcomes. Additionally, given this lack of recognition, ES staff in Careers and Pathways Departments in schools often change frequently and are often part-time. Assuming equity in pay and workload could be achieved, the ideal scenario would be a team of both VIT registered and ES Post Grad qualified staff in the Careers and Pathways Departments in schools.

Because of the trends above, there is often relatively little time available for staff in the Careers and Pathways area to give students who are school leavers, enough access to appropriate, effective Career advice. An individual student in a school may only see a Careers Counsellor once in their senior secondary school years. Additionally, the quality of the advice is compromised if not available from an experienced and qualified staff member. The needs of school leavers are therefore not always met and this has consequences for their employment outcomes. The Leadership in Secondary Schools need to be given the resources and the mandated instructions to fund and staff the Careers and Pathways Departments in their schools properly.

### **The challenges faced by school career advisers.**

Given the trends listed above which have devalued the Careers and Pathways positions in many schools, there are significant pressures on school Career Advisers. They often have inadequate time allotments to carry out their roles effectively. They often have multiple roles within the Careers and Pathways area which can be very time consuming. If school Career Advisers are ES staff with no prior experience, interest or qualifications in the Careers and Pathways area, they are often overwhelmed by the work in their roles and feel unsupported and undervalued. Those ES staff who do have the experience, interest and qualifications also feel overwhelmed and unsupported if these attributes are not officially acknowledged in their pay scale.

VET Clusters are extremely important in providing support for Careers Advisers who often have VET Coordination as part of their role. There has been no support given by the Government to VET Clusters, which are largely self funded by member schools.

Currently, in pre- teaching service training there is very little emphasis on learning about VCAL and VET. There is very little teacher training available for the Career and Pathways area. However, even if DET was to reintroduce Career Advice into teacher training as a specialist area, the system would be inadequate because it would be dependent on each Secondary College's commitment (budgetary and philosophical) to Careers Advice.

All teachers in training should be required to learn basic career development theory and labour market trends and should then be obliged to keep abreast of at least some of these items with relation to their own teaching or curriculum areas as a minimum.

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

Young people in regional Victoria are significantly disadvantaged in their access to a broad range of educational opportunities. The reality is that they will have to leave home to access Tertiary study with significant expenses, often unable to be met by their families. Additionally, there are often fewer job and apprenticeship opportunities in country towns for school leavers who do not wish to pursue Tertiary study. Their Career Advice needs are even higher than those needed by students in metropolitan schools.

To address the Career Advice needs of students in Regional areas there needs to be more funding made available to Regional schools. This funding must specifically target the staffing of the Career

Pathways areas in the schools. Additionally, there needs to be more training of Careers and Pathways teachers in teaching courses and incentives for them to find employment in Regional schools. However, in some areas of metropolitan Melbourne there is also significant youth unemployment which strongly suggests that their Career Advice needs have not been met by their Secondary Schools which also need adequate funding to staff Careers and Pathways Departments in their schools.

### **Interstate and overseas best practice models that could be implemented in Victoria**

The German system is acknowledged to be of 'best practice'. Students often know what jobs they will be going into well before they complete their schooling, with employers often providing support to students over the final years of mandatory schooling, as part of their commitment to the student becoming a valued member of staff.

The Swiss model has also been very successful in a similar manner to that of the German model. If either of these models were to be adopted, there would need to be a major shift in the thinking and culture of employers, as well as educators and schools.

Please contact me if you would like clarification on any of the information provided above. I would be very pleased to assist the inquiry in any way.

Thank You,

**Vicki Bawden**

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