



EEJSC Submission No. 57
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Executive Officer
Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee
Parliament of Victoria

Via email: eejsc@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian Parliament's inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools. Our submission reflects the views, insights and experience gained as a non-school senior secondary provider, VET in Schools provider and as a further education destination for many school leavers within our communities, both those who have completed senior-secondary education and early school leavers.

This year, Holmesglen has engaged over 250 students in the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) at our Vocational College campuses in Moorabbin and Glen Waverley. The Vocational College was established over 10 years ago to provide an alternative setting to school for young people who wished to pursue a more vocationally-relevant senior secondary option. Increasingly, college learners are opting to undertake VCAL at Holmesglen as a result of their previous VET in Schools experience and to further explore these skills as a pathway to their employment goals. The college offers a comprehensive career pathway planning service to its learners and we join with our school-based peers in networks such as VCAL cluster groups and LLENs to share resources and build better connections across the sector. Holmesglen also offers general career counselling services to prospective learners and their influencers (such as parents and carers), in addition to the services offered through Holmesglen's Skills and Jobs Centre.

Holmesglen also partners with local secondary schools across the public, independent and catholic sectors to provide VET in Schools programs. This year, we have seen over 900 enrolments by students still at school in skilled occupational areas including hospitality, building, construction and furnishings, tourism and events, community services, early childhood education, sport and recreation, arts, media and design, and allied health. Pleasingly, the demand from schools to engage in a broad range of VET options (beyond the more traditional trade-based areas) is increasing.

Prospective student events are also conducted throughout the year and we have seen over 34,000 secondary students engage in school-based and independent job/career expos, regional tertiary information service sessions, on-campus study tasters, campus tours and presentations about the vocational and higher education offerings at Holmesglen. Close contact is maintained with career advisors in schools through our newsletters, attendance at regional career group meetings, Holmesglen-run career practitioner seminars and one-on-one contact.

Holmesglen is, therefore, well positioned to provide input into the committee's terms of reference, particularly in relation to the:

- extent to which career advice activities meet the needs of school leavers
- challenges advisers face in helping young Victorians transition from education to the workforce
- strategies to improve the effectiveness of career advice activities for school leavers.

Our submission is structured around these three items.

Extent to which career advice activities meet the needs of school leavers

Our key message to the inquiry regarding the effectiveness of career advice in meeting the needs of school leavers **and our economy** is that VET is often not well understood or promoted as a means of securing a successful career pathway - as a school-based study option, as a post-school destination and as a mechanism to reskill and maintain vocational currency in employment. If we could change one aspect of career advice in schools, it would be to improve the engagement of careers advisors with VET providers, our industry partners and our educators to improve the relationships between us and to increase the knowledge and capability of career advisors to present the full range of options available to students. VET is not just a second chance option, it is a viable and proven mechanism to secure sustainable employment.

At a local level, our experience is that schools vary greatly in their approach to:

- career advising and the value they place on these activities
- working with disengaged students at the school and the support offered to transition from school to another educational environment
- promoting the range of further study options available to school leavers beyond a university-based pathway.

While some schools offer high-value career development activities, we note that other schools maintain a somewhat minimal approach. We observe that the school's leadership is a major influencer on the nature of and resources put into a school's career advice services, which can produce variable outcomes in meeting the needs of students. We also perceive schools positioning themselves in the education system to reflect a desired reputation and ability to attract students from certain demographics or with certain interests. This is evident not only in the approach taken to career advice, but the programs offered by schools such as VCAL, VET in Schools subjects and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. We contend that some schools, particularly public schools, are seeking to establish themselves as alternatives to already 'successful' schools in the region and use metrics such as VTAC statistics to justify their emerging reputation. This narrows the diversity of the school and its programs and can discourage individuals with non-university aspirations. This cycle is then entrenched and students who sit outside these motivations and abilities have limited options for achieving senior-secondary qualifications and for gaining quality career advice.

Career advice activities in many schools also tends to be focussed on subject selection for Years 11 and 12 in the context of a post-school destination and particular course of further study, most typically an undergraduate degree at a university. It tends to be set in a simplistic linear career development model. To better meet the needs of school leavers it would be more useful for career advisory services to facilitate students' understanding of their strengths in a work context and their levels of maturity in understanding the notion of a career. It is also important to acknowledge and build on students' extensive existing work-related skills developed through casual work and family responsibilities and to develop students' career vocabulary, professional identity and skills to plan for a career as a lifelong pathway. The growing tendency for school leavers to take a 'gap year'

increases the importance of making this plan in non-linear ways. Having a 'plan A, B, C and D' to achieve a career goal may be more useful for students, than a first VTAC preference, second and so on. To do this, however, students, parents and careers advisors need accurate and relevant information about the full range of career options available through VET and higher education pathways.

Challenges advisers face in helping young Victorian's transition from education to the workforce

In our experience, the major challenge for advisers is the availability of time and resources to provide quality career pathway planning. In many schools the role of careers advisor is undertaken by teachers who also have a teaching responsibility. This reduces the amount of time/attention/ability to update themselves on career path options for post year 12 students. Even where there are dedicated careers advisors, they are also being squeezed for time to meet/liaise with colleagues to share information.

Feedback from some school leavers suggests that careers advisors in schools can be overwhelmed with the number of students they are required to assist. They report that career advising can feel like a production line. Students who have some career direction are often suggested careers and courses by the career advisor, with little exploration. Those who do not have a clear vocational direction and require extra resources and time to gain self-insight and to explore vocational options, are also faced with limited career advisor availability. The consequences for these individuals is significant, as they are less likely to engage in post-secondary education. Those who do progress to further study, will often not successfully engage with their course or may try a number of courses in the hope of finding their direction. At worst, these school leavers may disengage with further education, leading to reduced employment prospects. Only a few will seek the assistance of careers counsellors within providers such as Holmesglen.

It is acknowledged that parental influence features strongly in the career development of school students. The ability of school career advisors to change inaccurate and incorrect parental perceptions is problematic when time, knowledge and resources are limited. Furthermore, most career advisors have limited connections to industry and their knowledge of work and occupations is often dated, having been employed in a school, not commercial environment, for most of their working lives. There is also an acknowledged lack of an Australian evidence-base for career advisory services. This includes the validity and reliability of assessment tools, job and employer skill needs, local labour markets and responding to contemporary recruitment processes.

We would also contend that the capability of career advisors to maintain awareness of career options beyond the mainstream occupations presents a further challenge. At a recent Careers Practitioner Seminar run by Holmesglen, the focus of the day was on trades. The attending career advisors were astounded by the options available to their students. For example, in plumbing they were unaware of the specialisations within the trade for both their male and female students. The same was identified in furniture making. They were equally unaware of the skills gaps in areas such as digital printing. It also enabled them to discuss with our staff the options for students to undertake VET programs for their students as part of their VCE studies and therefore explore options other than university post year 12.

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

Increasing the effectiveness of career advice for school leavers will take resources and increased funding to make time available and expand the range of activities conducted by schools to help students develop a career pathway plan. However, there needs to be greater clarity and stronger requirements to meet minimum expectations, both in terms of career advice as a service and the skills, experience and professional standards of those who perform this role. This includes defining

the scope of practice and improving the profile of careers advisors as a key link between young people and the Australian workforce. Additionally, the current minimum qualification for career practitioners is the Certificate IV in Career Development. We would suggest that, although this training provides a general introduction to careers, it does not allow for the comprehensive development of career counselling skills and in-depth evidence-based practice. A post-graduate qualification would provide a greater skill base for career advisors and greater outcomes for their students.

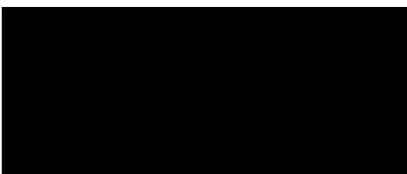
We would also advocate from improving the connections between career advisors, the full range of post-school education providers and industry through a program of professional development and teacher release. We recognise that this is one area where TAFE institutes could increase access to its resources for parents and schools and facilitate improved connections and currency of information on current and emerging skill needs. This would, however, require the support of school leadership and the Department to ensure teachers are released to attend.

Improving the degree of evidence-based practice and re-instating comprehensive free resources such as *The Job Guide* (now commercially published in a limited form as *The Good Careers Guide*) and *myfuture* (again, limited in comparison to earlier versions) would also greatly assist. Although, we do acknowledge that these tend to be the joint remit of the federal and state governments. However, improved communications to schools, parents and students regarding VET options and their pathways to further study and employment should be a state priority.

Finally, we would contend that careers education needs to commence much earlier than Year 10, be integrated in the curriculum and focus on developing students' competencies to plan for a career or many careers over their lifetime. Portfolio-based approaches are also useful in capturing the generic work-related skills already being developed by young people through part-time and casual employment, work in a family business, VET subjects undertaken at school and other vocational tasters, engagement in sporting clubs and social associations and responsibilities caring or supporting family members. These early experiences help students identify the transferable skills they have already acquired, understand their strengths and the feasibility of pursuing a pathway to a particular occupational group. Portfolio approaches also encourage students to explore their career interests, rather than make a 'choice', and assist students to translate their skills and knowledge into a variety of contexts to demonstrate their generic employability and understanding of career pathways.

I hope this submission proves a useful input into the inquiry. Please contact my office on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED], if we can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely



Mary Faraone
Chief Executive