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Mitchell Institute submission to the 'Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools'

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Overview

Mitchell Institute welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ‘Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools,’ being undertaken by the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee.

Mitchell Institute at Victoria University is an independent think tank that works to improve the connection between education, evidence and policy reform. Mitchell’s mission is to achieve an education system that fosters curious, creative and resilient learners, and entrepreneurial and skilled workers.

The Inquiry addresses critically important issues facing many young people in Victoria today. The transition from school to work is a period when too many young people fall through the cracks. Providing high quality careers advice and guidance throughout school is an important strategy for improving post-school transitions.

Mitchell Institute argues that improving careers advice and guidance must form part of a broader re-focus of the education system to ensure that all young people are equipped with the capabilities they need to thrive in the changing world of work.

The **Terms of Reference** of the inquiry is inclusive of, but not limited to the following:

1. examining the relationship between career advice activities and workforce participation of young Victorians;
2. investigating the extent to which career advice activities meet the needs of school leavers;
3. examining the challenges advisers face helping young Victorians transition from education to the workforce;
4. considering strategies to improve the effectiveness of career advice activities for school leavers;
5. investigate the career advice needs of young people in regional Victoria and ways to address these needs; and
6. exploring what other jurisdictions both in Australia and overseas have in place that could be implemented in Victoria.

This submission will explore the relationship between careers education and current youth employment outcomes, as well as directions for reforms to the education system so that young people are prepared to excel in multiple careers.

The submission will highlight:

- the critical challenges in the current labour market for young people transitioning from school to work
- what we know about careers advice and guidance from the literature
- implications for education policy in Victoria

Contextualising careers education in a changing world:

Young people now are navigating a vastly different world of work to that of previous generations. Technology is rapidly disrupting how we live and work – many tasks at the core of low and medium skill jobs have been automated or contracted offshore – a trend set to continue (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2016).

Increasingly, young people will need different skill sets to thrive in technology-rich, globalised, competitive job markets. We need to adapt our approaches to education so that young people are equipped with the capabilities that will enable them to thrive in complex education and employment settings.

There is a growing evidence base for the importance of *capabilities* – in modern workplaces, employers are increasingly seeking resilient and creative young people with the ability to work in teams, think critically and solve problems. Capabilities, which are also widely referred to as non-cognitive skills, enterprise skills, 21st Century skills or soft skills, are the set of skills, behaviours and dispositions which enable individuals to translate their knowledge and skills into meaningful action in changing contexts (Lucas & Claxton, 2009).

Capabilities feature in the Victorian Curriculum – schools have commenced teaching and assessing a set of 4 key capabilities, and critical and creative thinking has been set as a government target (as has resilience and physical activity).

Similarly, careers education practitioners have embraced the need to shift from ‘point in time’ advice to the development of the capabilities young people need to manage their careers over a lifetime (Polvere & Lim, 2015). Opportunities to further develop these *career capabilities* must be maximised in all aspects of learning in Victorian schools.

1. Careers advice and youth employment outcomes

In increasingly technology-rich and globally competitive job markets, the pathways to employment are becoming more challenging and precarious for many young people as they leave school.

Despite ongoing policy efforts to improve young people's transitions to the labour market, many young people are confronted with a number of challenges:

Youth unemployment and underemployment

Young people tend to be disproportionately impacted in tough labour markets. Youth unemployment has remained high in Australia since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC).

- Throughout 2017, the youth unemployment rate has averaged close to 13 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017), while youth unemployment rates have remained at persistently high levels in some regions across the country (Torii & O'Connell, 2017).
- There are fewer full-time work opportunities and an increase in the share of part-time jobs (Noonan & Pilcher, 2017). In 2016, 25 per cent of young people aged 15-24 who weren't studying were employed full-time, down from 34 per cent in 2007 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016)
- The number of long-term unemployed young people has been on the rise with 50,500 young people in Australia unemployed for over a year at September 2017 – three times the number before the GFC (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2017).

Transitions from education and training to employment

Many young people do not find employment in the field they studied and trained for, or are taking longer to find work after graduating. Declining labour market outcomes prompt questions about a possible mismatch between study decisions and employment opportunities.

- In 2016, only one third (33.2 per cent) of VET graduates were employed in the occupation they trained in (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2016).
- The full-time employment rate for bachelor degree graduates 4 months after graduation was 71 per cent in 2016, compared to 85 per cent in 2007 (Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT), 2016).
- One year after graduating, 25 per cent of the 2012-13 bachelor graduation cohort were working part time, compared with 17 per cent of the cohort who graduated between 2001-2005 (Wilkins, 2017)

In contrast to rising university participation, fewer young people are pursuing VET as a training pathway from school. In the last two years, the number of 15-19 year olds participating in government funded VET places fell from 203,600 to 193,400 nationally – the largest decline of all age groups (NCVER, 2017).

In the recent Mission Australia Youth Survey, 77.3 per cent of 15 to 19 year olds in Victoria indicated that they were planning to go to university after leaving school, while only 7.7 per cent planned to go to TAFE or college, and 4.3 per cent planned to undertake an apprenticeship (Mission Australia, 2017).

Young people's declining participation in VET is a concern given that, of the almost 950,000 new jobs estimated to be created in Australia between 2018 and 2022, it is projected that around 412,000 will require a bachelor degree or higher and around 443,000 will require a VET qualification (Commonwealth Department of Employment, 2017).

A recent report cites the "uneven nature and quality of the advice about VET given to young people in schools" as one reason that school leavers are not engaging in VET (Donners et al 2017).

Given the challenges faced by young people transitioning to work, and the mismatches between training pathways and actual jobs in the labour market, there is a clear need for improved careers advice and guidance to support young people in their transitions to work.

2. Opportunities for career education to improve transitions

In the last decade, there has been an expansion of supports for careers education in schools and a range of resources made available to students across the country, and in Victoria. Yet transitions from school to work continue to be a challenge for many young people.

Policy-makers recognise the broad public benefit associated with the provision of careers advice to school students. By ensuring that young people develop the types of skills that are matched to labour market opportunities and by improving young people's ability to manage their careers, careers advice supports broader efficiency and workforce productivity (Polvere & Lim, 2015).

Careers advice and guidance is also a particularly important tool for improving the career management capacity of young people from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds who may lack the social supports and networks that facilitate access to a broad set of employment opportunities.

What we know about careers education

The evidence highlights that the formation of career aspirations and plans is a complex developmental process influenced by a range of factors in a young person's life:

- **Career aspirations are formed early on**

Most children are developing occupational aspirations, and at age 7 children already envisage realistic future careers (Moulton, Flouri, Joshi, & Sullivan, 2014). Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, and Albright (2015) found a commonality in students' career aspirations from year 4 through to year 10. Yet, careers education policy and practice tends to focus on the later years of secondary school, particularly when students are required to select subjects and make decisions about post-school destinations (Gore et al., 2015). This risks missing many opportunities to build children's career awareness and skills throughout the primary and middle years.

- **Link between SES and career aspirations**

Students' socioeconomic background can influence the formation of ambitious goals which help attainment (Sikora & Saha, 2011). While students from lower SES backgrounds do not necessarily lack aspirations, they may have a less solid understanding of the technical and strategic requirements for realising them (Galliot & Graham, 2014).

Key strategies and supports for careers education in schools:

- National: Australian Blueprint for Career Development, MyFuture website, Career Bullseye posters, Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework
- Victoria: Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs), Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/curriculum/Pages/careers.aspx>

- **Educational achievement**

There is strong evidence showing that students who perform well academically are more likely to have higher career aspirations (Schoon & Polek, 2011), and that low academic achievement is a stronger predictor of students' career aspirations than SES (Gore et al., 2015). Baxter (2017) found that of the adolescents in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) aged 14-15 years, boys with the lowest NAPLAN scores were most certain of their career pathways listing technician or trades jobs as their highest preference. This suggests a narrowing of career options for students who perform poorly on academic assessments.

- **Parental influence**

Parental influence is a critical driver of young people's educational and occupational aspirations (Gemici, Bednarz, Karmel, & Lim, 2014). Baxter (2017) found that adolescents in LSAC aged 14-15 years speak more to their parents about their career aspirations than peers, careers counsellors or teachers. The perceived expectations of parents and peers is the key influence for students who go to university straight from school (Gemici et al., 2014).

Box 1: Exploring alternative models of career exploration

The Paradigm Shifters: Entrepreneurial Learning in Schools

In 2016, the entrepreneurial learning initiative ran in 21 government secondary schools in Victoria and NSW with students ranging from years 7 to 12. Student groups were given the opportunity to identify and solve problems that they felt were worth solving in their school and communities.

The initiative was predominantly student led, with students being in charge of the co-design processes and making decisions to bring their ideas to life. Some of the student-led initiatives were:

- Students setting up a website platform to sell their art class design projects to wider networks in order to help launch students' careers
- Setting up a dedicated program growing produce for the local community and raising awareness about health issues
- Reimagining what work experience could be for Year 10 students by designing and running a work experience expo for Year 9 students to create a process for more student choice and voice in their future pathways

Teachers reported a number of benefits from the initiative including students building skills such as leadership, public speaking, pitches, writing and interviewing. Some teachers cited evidence of students re-thinking their post-school options (e.g. going to university or setting up their own business).

Source: Mitchell Institute's The Paradigm Shifters: Entrepreneurial Learning in Schools (Anderson, Hinz, & Matus, 2017)

Implications for policy

Policy-makers considering strategies to improve careers advice and guidance should consider the important link between a student's educational experiences and how they form career aspirations and develop career plans. Improving careers education cannot happen in isolation from students' daily learning experiences in the classroom, across their schooling years. Schools are well placed to develop the career capabilities of students, however this must be a system-wide effort.

To achieve an education system that equips young people with the foundational capabilities they need to manage their careers over a lifetime, Mitchell Institute recommends that policy-makers consider the following priority areas:

1. The need to start career development activities early on

By the time subject selection activities take place in senior secondary school, many students have already narrowed their career aspirations based largely on academic achievement levels. Ensuring that career awareness and development activities are extended to the primary and early secondary school years, can help to lift aspirations and extend the range of career possibilities, particularly for students at risk of disengagement.

2. A focus on building students' capabilities

The narrowing of career options for students who perform poorly on academic assessments represents a key challenge for education systems. Extensive evidence supports the notion that skills and capabilities are as necessary for success in life and work as knowledge and academic achievement (Almlund, Duckworth, Heckman, & Kautz, 2011; Garcia, 2014; Gutman & Schoon, 2013; Heckman, Stixrud, & Urzua, 2006). The Foundation for Young Australians highlights a range of capabilities that are portable across jobs, and that developing them can set young people up for multiple careers (The Foundation for Young Australians, 2016). Extending the focus of schooling to these broader capabilities is an essential strategy for schools to prepare young people to thrive in their future careers.

3. Opportunities to engage in meaningful real-world learning

Integrating school learning with experiences in real-world contexts opens students up to career possibilities outside of their family and peer networks, offers the possibility for students to build their own networks, and apply and test the different types of capabilities that will be useful in their future careers. It also gives students the opportunity to establish connections with occupational role models or potential employers. While a variety of approaches exist, **Box 1** provides one example of a successful real-world learning program for schools.

4. Equipping teachers with broader knowledge of industry and VET pathways

In addition to careers advisors, all teachers play a role in guiding students as they develop their career aspirations and plans. Whole of school approaches that support all teachers to gain access to information on emerging and key employment industries, as well as education and training pathways that may exist outside their realms (e.g.: VET pathways) should be a priority. Engaging with industry can take many forms – schools directly establishing industry links through careers or vocational programs, programs coordinated by external organisations,¹ and place-based models such as Tech Schools and P-TECHs. Exploring flexible models in regional and rural areas where exposure to a broader range of industries is less viable is particularly important (CEAV, 2017).

¹ An examples includes the Ardoch Foundation's Learning Through Lunch program which introduces primary school students to hospitality pathways (<https://www.ardoch.org.au/what-we-do-our-programs/broadening-horizons/learning-through-lunch-2>)

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