



Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee

Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

AEU (Vic) Submission

Introduction

The Australian Education Union (Vic) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian parliamentary Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian Schools. This important area of secondary school operation needs to be better resourced and have its status upgraded and we see the Inquiry as having the potential to identify the specific areas of concern and investigate and analyse how these concerns can be addressed. Our submission is informed by feedback from school careers advisors and teachers from government secondary schools in metropolitan, regional and rural locations. The picture of careers education they paint is a patchwork of some very successful programs and many others where a lack of resources limits their effectiveness. Our expectation is that any outcomes of the Inquiry would be designed to enhance the capacity of all government schools to provide the best possible career programs for their students.

We would also note that this parliamentary Inquiry seems to be running in parallel with the Department of Education and Training's "comprehensive review" into career education in Victorian government schools launched by the Minister for Education, James Merlino, in July 2017. It is unclear to us how the two reviews/inquiries relate to each other as they seem to be focusing on the same issues (as far as government schools are concerned) with different timelines. We would hope that the recommendations from these parallel inquiries would not create any confusion or additional work for staff in government schools or delay any additional support needed by schools to improve their provision of career advice to students.

The Context

Careers education has always been a complex area of learning in schools. While it may involve specific roles and programs, there is also a sense that the whole secondary school curriculum, involving various subjects and courses, is an integral part of career learning for students. Its complexity however, has sometimes been glossed over by limiting it to the process of identifying an immediate pathway (a course or occupational area) for each exiting student. In 2004 the OECD set out the elements of a more holistic approach in a set of guidelines for schools.

Schools must ensure that all students can access career guidance, not just a few; extend career guidance beyond a personal service approach focused upon immediate occupational and tertiary education decisions; allow all young people, as part of the curriculum, to develop the skills to manage their progression in learning and work throughout their lives; and incorporate an experiential component, closely

*linked to the labour market and the world of work.*¹

Studies of school careers education on school and post-school student outcomes have stressed the importance of students participating in these programs. A 2015 study involving 700 students in New South Wales found that those uncertain about their careers across all year groupings (from Years 9 to 12) reported never having access to a career education session or participating in school-organised work experience programs.² A 2011 NCVER study found that “occupational expectations which are formed in high school have a positive effect on the chances of securing high-status employment upon entry to the labour force.... This finding vindicates the potential positive influence of vocational counselling programs which foster ambitious goals”.³ Two, six country (including Australia) studies of PISA data found statistically significant associations between student participation in school career activities – speaking with a careers advisor, job fairs, job shadowing and internships – and more positive attitudes towards schooling⁴ and higher mathematics scores⁵.

More recently the issue of how to prepare young people for post-school destinations has become mixed up with predictions about the indeterminate future of work. As the pace and impact of digitisation and automation, globalisation and what has been termed the “flexible-collaborative economy” increases so does the uncertainty (and the accompanying insecurity) about what work will be like in the future and what jobs will exist as technology transforms an ever lengthening swathe of occupations. Schools and their careers advisors are being asked to prepare students for future jobs which do not presently exist and castigated for supposedly not doing this. The unclear vision society has of the future is being laid at the feet of schools with the expectation that they will ‘solve’ the problem by themselves.

Mark Scillio, the author of *Making Career Stories* (2017), has outlined what he believes are some of the important qualities young people now need “for their messy careers and uncertain lives” in the digitally disrupted future.

*What is clear is that schools play a central role in nurturing the resilience, curiosity and general life skills that students will need to meet the complex demands of the awaiting job market. This all poses big challenges for the education system. But in our deliberations about helping to create the future workforce, maintaining a broad conception of developing the whole person – and not becoming too mesmerised by digital technology – remains the most important thing teachers can do.*⁶

¹ OECD (2004), *Career guidance and public policy: Bridging the gap*, p.40
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/innovation-education/34050171.pdf>

² Natal'ya Galliot (2015), *Career studies and advice: start early or don't start at all*, The Conversation, April 30
<https://theconversation.com/career-studies-and-advice-start-early-or-dont-start-at-all-40563>

³ Joanna Sikora and Lawrence Saha (2011), *Lost talent? The occupational ambitions and attainments of young Australians*, NCVER p.44 <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED514894.pdf>

⁴ Elnaz T. Kashefpakdel, Dr Anthony Mann, and Matteo Schleicher (2016), *The impact of career development activities on student attitudes towards school utility: an analysis of data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*, Education and Employers <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/the-impact-of-career-development-activities-on-student-attitudes-towards-school-utility-an-analysis-of-data-from-the-organisation-for-economic-co-operation-and-developments-programme-for-int/>

⁵ Elnaz T. Kashefpakdel and Matteo Schleicher (2017), *The impact of career development activities on PISA mathematics tests An analysis of data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)*, Education and Employers <https://www.educationandemployers.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The-impact-of-career-development-activities-on-PISA-Maths.pdf>

⁶ Mark Scillio (2017), *The unsettling future of work*, AEU News Term 3 2017, pp 32-33.

Career Advisor/Teacher Role

At the centre of careers education in schools is the position of careers advisor/teacher. The national survey of careers education in schools carried out by McCrindle found that students ranked careers advisors second only to parents as the main influence on their career planning.⁷

The expectations built into the role of careers advisor/teacher have expanded over the past few years and the role now encompasses a very broad and diverse set of tasks. The Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) in its benchmarking careers resource for schools sets out the present expectations for careers advisors:

- “support students to make informed choices about future work or study and understand the general skills and self-management capacity they will need to achieve this;
- have knowledge in diverse employment trends and career pathways;
- hold professional qualifications and memberships;
- provide more in-depth counselling for students with higher needs;
- work not just within the career development service, but work effectively with teaching staff to promote career learning in the classroom context;
- respond to an increasing emphasis on work placements and work-based learning while managing attendant risks, safety and legal complexities;
- keep pace with technology and integrate it effectively into career development services;
- build relationships not just across the school organisation but with employers, industry, vocational education and training institutions, universities, parents and the local community to make the career service as relevant as possible to students and their community”⁸

In some schools careers advisors (which may be the careers team) have the capacity to effectively carry out the range of tasks set out above because they have the time, resources and support to do so.

An example of a school with a comprehensive careers program:

A government secondary college in Melbourne’s south eastern growth corridor catering for students in Years 10, 11 and 12, it delivers VCE, VCAL and has an extensive VET program. It is also a Registered Training Organisation. The structure of the school’s careers program enables it to assist a student with their program and subject choices so that they may make an informed decision for post-compulsory options. Each year level has some activities that are common and some that are age/year specific.

Common activities – All students create a Career Action Plan (CAP) that allows them to reflect on their personal attributes as well as their interests and career aspirations. These are visited by all students more than once each year. The CAP is also used in one-on-one discussions with a careers team member and in the case of a student who is exiting the school. Other common activities include presentations from University and TAFE providers, visits to Careers Expos, excursions to TAFEs and Universities and an open door policy where all students are encouraged to visit the Pathways Hub with any and all questions. The school uses a range of careers tests,

⁷ CICA-McCrindle (2017), Insights into our school based Career Practitioners, The McCrindle Blog <http://mccrindle.com.au/the-mccrindle-blog/Insights-int-our-school-based-career-practitioners>

⁸ CICA (2014), School career development service: Benchmarking Resource <https://cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/CICA-School-Career-Benchmarking-Resource1.pdf>

belongs to a number of networks and has career education connected to their website.

All Year 10 students complete a semester of a subject called World of Work. They participate in a range of activities such as Occupational Health and Safety, resumes, Mock Interviews, career testing, Work Experience and subject selection for their final two years at school. Students attend a Subject Expo to determine the best subject choices for both pathway and interest.

All Year 11 students select either VCE or VCAL. VCE students are offered excursions to universities and encouraged to attend Open Days. VCAL students are required to complete Structured Workplace Learning as part of one of their VET certificates.

All Year 12 students attend sessions on VTAC, have the opportunity to go on a range of excursions and have an individual appointment with the Careers Advisor. Students either put in a VTAC application, attend an apprenticeship interview organised by the school or provide proof that they have employment or training in place. They are followed up after school resumes in the following year and then again 6 months later. We track student destinations and use data from On Track to understand the pathways students select.⁹

Another careers advisor in a rural school summarized the things which are working well for them:

The focus here has been on finding the right university course and getting into Uni. I feel that the advice offered here does meet the needs of these students as we look for alternate pathways as well as the usual straightforward approach. We have a very good relationship with a number of businesses in the area who are willing to take work experience and structured work placement students. Many also contact us when they are looking for apprentices and part time workers. We also have a local careers educators' network who invite local council and businesses to a meeting in order to gauge the needs of local industry.¹⁰

This example illustrates the importance of providing support for schools to build meaningful long term relationships with business and industry.

However, in many schools the time and support for careers advisors to implement a whole school quality program is not there and there is evidence from our feedback from schools that the time available for careers teachers to carry out their role has been decreasing. While there are no publicly available Victorian - specific survey results, the CICA-McCrindle national survey of 716 career practitioners conducted in November-December 2016 (including careers advisors in Victorian schools) found that the 24 per cent had their time allowance reduced over the past three years and that career practitioners were 2 times more likely to have had their time allowance decreased rather than increased over the same period.¹¹

The CICA¹² survey found that 52 per cent of the respondents did their role on a part-time basis and only 42 per cent of this group was able to devote all of their time to careers

⁹ Feedback from school careers team leader

¹⁰ Feedback from school careers advisor

¹¹ CICA-McCrindle (2017), op.cit.

¹² The CICA – Career Industry Council of Australia - is the national body for career practitioners in Australia

development. The other 58 percent had other responsibilities such as classroom teaching, management and student counselling. The survey also found that there was a significant gap between full time and part-time careers advisors in terms of being able to fully implement career development strategies which students find to be most helpful. For example, while 75 per cent of full time advisors were able to fully implement the most effective form of career development – interviews with a careers advisor – only 53 per cent of part-time advisors were able to do this. The other most effective career development strategies – work experience, VET in schools, hosting or visiting careers expos and attending University/TAFE open days – were also more difficult for part-time careers advisors to fully implement.¹³

Careers advisors in Victorian government schools fall into one of three employment categories: Leading Teacher, Classroom Teacher or Education Support (ES). While there are highly effective careers advisors in all three of these categories, there is evidence that there are fewer teacher-classification positions due to budget-based decisions. There are examples of careers advisors being employed in ES below Range 3 which should be the minimum in terms of the position description for this role. There is also anecdotal evidence from schools that there has been a decline in the number of Leading Teacher careers positions. This, like the reductions in time allowances, is due to schools deciding to prioritise certain areas of the curriculum and management to fit within the policy parameters of the Department of Education and Training (DET) and the constraints of their budgets. A very experienced careers teacher has expressed a real concern about this development.

The situation for teaching staff does not look promising, with very few new careers practitioner positions being advertised for teaching staff. I am concerned that the career structure for teacher practitioners has not just been degraded, it simply will not exist within government schools. A recent example of this is a leading teacher who was essentially offered the same job that they were currently doing at two-thirds of the pay rate. They were to be employed as an ES staff member. It is difficult not to see this as a cost-saving measure.

Many teacher practitioners have made enormous commitments of time and energy over the years to build their expertise. This expertise is likely to be lost as teachers are essentially forced to give up their roles as practitioners. As graduate teachers become more experienced, they will not have such a position to which they can aspire. In order to restore the career structure for teacher practitioners, government schools need to be in a position where the decision about the designation of the role is not heavily influenced by budgetary concerns.¹⁴

The deep understanding of learning and the career needs of young people teachers have due to their academic training and classroom experience should not be underestimated. However, government schools employ many highly experienced and highly skilled non-teaching staff as qualified careers advisors.

The McCrindle survey found that only 20 per cent of career advisors whose time allocation had been decreased over the past three years were in a promotional position or received a special payment. 81 per cent of this same group indicated that “greater support and recognition from my school leadership team” would enhance their work.¹⁵ It is a concern to the AEU that criticism of careers advisors in schools has focused on the supposed shortcomings of what they as individuals are presently doing in their position rather than recognising the limitations on their time and resources which act as constraints on their role.

¹³ CICA-McCrindle (2017), op.cit.

¹⁴ Formal feedback to the AEU from a Victorian government school careers teacher

¹⁵ CICA-McCrindle (2017), op.cit.

A strong case can be made for secondary school careers advisors/teachers being full time (1.0 EFT) to carry out the role as described by the CICA (see above). In larger schools a team approach is necessary with one or more careers advisors and/or additional time allowances and/or an assistant in order to fully implement an effective careers program.

The importance of the whole school being behind and supporting and valuing career education and careers advisors appear to be critical components of effective career education programs. The support of classroom teachers in referring students and helping to complete Managed Individual Pathways (MIPS) and career action plans, along with the acknowledgement of the leadership that careers is an important aspect of education, sends a positive message to students about the value of participation in career development activities. One careers advisor outlined the waste of time and energy when this doesn't happen.

I'm not sure the role is taken seriously by teaching staff – asking staff to complete career action plans and MIPS during mentoring/pastoral care time is taken with a grain of salt. This is seen as busy work rather than a valuable use of time. And I'm not sure the career action plans are looked at by anyone other than myself anyway (ie leadership just want them done to tick the box).¹⁶

There needs to be better support and professional development made available to classroom teachers to undertake their role in a whole school approach to careers education.

Qualifications

Because of the complexity of the role, careers advisors should have a careers education qualification. Presently there is no requirement for careers advisors in government schools to have a specific qualification in careers education. For teachers undertaking the role, a teaching degree and subsequent teaching experience provide an initial basis to meet the curriculum and pedagogical requirements of the careers teacher role as they give these advisors an understanding of students and how they learn. However, it is important that all careers advisors whether they have a teaching degree or not also have a specific careers qualification such as a graduate certificate, graduate diploma or Masters course so that they are on top of the knowledge base informing this complex area of learning.

The State Government study grant program which subsidized the costs of career advisors gaining a tertiary qualification ended in 2014. Funding should be provided to reintroduce and expand this initiative to meet the demand of people in career advisor positions without any formal qualification.

To illustrate the importance of completing a specific careers education course in addition to a teaching degree, a secondary school teacher with 12 years experience explained the difficult situation she found herself in on being appointed to a careers advisor position at her school.

I am a new careers advisor, having only started in the role this year. I don't feel my advice has been particularly effective for these students – I didn't have any training in the role at all, and it has taken me most of the year to find out what is available in our area [regional Victoria] and how to access this.

Having to learn as I go is a challenge – I don't know which community support for young people is available until I stumble across it. I don't yet feel confident that I am supporting everyone, particularly in getting students into alternative education when they are being exited. Initial and ongoing training would allow me to actually know

¹⁶ Formal feedback from a school careers advisor

*what services are available for students in the area, although I am slowly coming to understand these.*¹⁷

Professional Development

Career advisors indicate that they are often unable to find relevant professional development programs to ensure that they stay up-to-date with best practice in their field. The Career Education Association of Victoria (CEAV) offers training and professional development to careers advisors through the modest amount (\$22,000) they receive from the DET's Strategic Partnerships program. They provide two day intensive courses for recently appointed careers advisors, of which they have found there are many, due to the high drop-out rate from this position.

Feedback from careers advisors to the AEU identified the need for more professional development focusing on the needs of students with low motivation and limited career aspirations, students with a disability and students who are refugees.

Some careers advisors were critical of the professional development activities run by universities and LLENS.

*There are not enough PD's around Labour Market information, future jobs and job outlooks. Most of our PDs are run by universities promoting their own courses without the context of what is happening in the job market.*¹⁸

*Learn Local Education networks (LLENS) do not provide nearly enough relevant information to careers advisors. They cover SBATS [School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships], disengaged learners and employment but do not offer much in the way of careers education and development.*¹⁹

Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those who are less academically inclined, have greater difficulty in gaining meaningful work and experience difficulties making the transition to further education, training or work.²⁰ For example, a lack of family experience and understanding of higher education and problems of access linked to costs and distance create barriers to participation in university courses.

*Many of our students come from a Low SES and this creates issues for those interested in Higher Education (HE). We are also a very multi-cultural school and some of our students with Humanitarian Visas can't access Universities due to cost. Many of our students are first in family and the challenge is to assist young people to access HE should they be interested and have the desire to take on post-secondary schooling.*²¹

Sikora and Saha's NCVER study (2011) of the occupational ambitions and attainments of young Australians concluded that low levels of ambition lead to only modest occupational attainments. They found that around 15 per cent of high-achieving Australian students lower their initially ambitious career plans, which then impacts adversely on their eventual attainments. This was particularly the case for low SES students.

¹⁷ Formal feedback from school careers advisor

¹⁸ Formal feedback from school careers advisor

¹⁹ Formal feedback from school careers advisor

²⁰ Natal'ya Galliot (2015), *Career studies and advice: start early or don't start at all*, The Conversation, April 30.

²¹ Formal feedback from school careers advisor

*It is notable that, all else being equal, youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to lower their ambitious plans. This is the case even when the variations in academic achievement, the influences of teachers and peers, and gender differences have been all taken into account.*²²

The study recommends that these students might benefit from: specially targeted programs which offer ongoing and structured support to help them maintain their initial plans; school-level policies which develop student career knowledge in the early years of high school; and educational programs which encourage parental participation and support in the process of youth career planning.²³

The Managed Individual Pathways (MIPS) program for students in Years 10-12 in Victorian government schools (used to develop individual Career Action Plans) does include additional funding above the base allocation to schools with Student Family Occupation (SFO) densities greater than a threshold value to support young people at risk of disengaging or not making a successful transition to further education, training or secure employment.

More fundamentally, governments need to increase their overall financial support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are predominantly in public schools (e.g. 170,982 students from the lowest SES quarter – or 79.5 per cent of all students in Victoria in this category - are in government schools)²⁴. Career opportunities are linked to educational achievement and improving educational achievement is linked to properly resourced intervention strategies.

*Whilst analyses of the educational achievement of Australian students through international assessments like PISA consistently show that low-SES students are lower achieving, there is more to be done in supporting the educational achievement of these students in order to achieve their access to a full range of careers. This is particularly true given the significant role of prior achievement in shaping aspirations.*²⁵

Post-school education options

The feedback from a number of careers advisors is critical of the emphasis at the school level, and in terms of government policies and the media, on higher education as the most important and most desirable destination for all school leavers. The focus on VCE outcomes and judging schools and students by ATAR attainment downgrades other options and can get in the way of seeing clearly what may be the best pathways for students. The need to develop parity of esteem for VCAL and courses at TAFE (seeing them as equally important but different career pathways) must have greater priority.

The latest statistics about VET and VET enrolments in government schools are of concern and may reflect the media and political emphasis on the desirability of university destinations, VET fee rises, and the scandals arising from the inflated funding of private VET and the dire financial situation of the public provider –TAFE.

There was a substantial decline in VET enrolments in Victoria over the period 2013-16 and

²² Joanna Sikora and Lawrence Saha (2011), *Lost talent? The occupational ambitions and attainments of young Australians*, NCVER p.43 <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED514894.pdf>

²³ Ibid p.44

²⁴ Senate Committee: Education and Employment, Question on Notice No. SQ17-000752, Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018

²⁵ Jennifer Gore, Kathryn Holmes, Max Smith, Erica Southgate and Jim Albright (2015), *Socioeconomic status and the career aspirations of Australian school students: Testing enduring assumptions*, The Australian Education Researcher, Vol.42 Issue 2, p. 173 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13384-015-0172-5>

this was particularly evident in the 19 years and under age group.

Victorian VET Enrolments²⁶

	Overall enrolments	19 years and under
2013	498,000	107,000
2014	460,500	85,700
2015	391,300	70,100
2016	338,400	59,300

[Source: NCVER (2017), Historical VET data 1981 – 2016]

Over the period 2012 to 2016 the number of Victorian government school students enrolled in VET programs fell by 2,733 while the numbers of students in Years 10-12 in government schools increased by 3,097²⁷.

VET in schools programs – certificate enrolments government schools²⁸

2012	39,081	2015	36,940
2013	38,146	2016	36,348
2014	37,644		

The decline in VET in schools enrolments coincides with the previous State Coalition Government's decision to cut the funding of VCAL Coordinators who provided a dedicated resource to enable students to follow career pathways involving VET participation and real work.

Another concern expressed in feedback from careers advisors was the timeliness and transparency of information provided by universities and its impact on careers programs in schools.

*Universities often release information relevant to that year at the last minute (July, August) right before VTAC applications are due. This means that we can't provide up to date information to students. Information changes too frequently making it difficult to ensure we are always giving our students up to date information.*²⁹

*Universities need to be more transparent with ATARs. The trend at Victoria University where ATARs are not being used for most courses means it's hard for career advisors to provide advice on entry requirements.*³⁰

*Completion rates at TAFEs and Unis – Although information from Universities is about to become more transparent, it has been difficult to discover if students from our school have completed the course they enrolled in. This information is extremely valuable in supporting the work that we do*³¹.

There were also recommendations for improved post-school student tracking opportunities which could contribute to a more informed evaluation of careers education within the school

²⁶ NCVER (2017), Historical time series of government-funded vocational education and training from 1981 to 2016 <https://www.ncver.edu.au/data/data/all-data/historical-time-series-of-government-funded-vocational-education-and-training-from-1981-to-2016#>

²⁷ DET Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools 2012 -16

²⁸ DET, Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools, July 2017

²⁹ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/departments/brochurejuly.pdf>

³⁰ Formal feedback from school careers advisor

³¹ Formal feedback from school careers advisor

program structure. “Understanding where students go after they have left school would assist in improving opportunities and positive outcomes for both current students and those no longer attached to an educational setting”. It is important to ensure that vulnerable students do not get ‘lost’ once they leave school and that there are clear connections between government social service agencies, private service agencies, schools, VET and universities.

DET career resources

On the whole career advisors describe the career resources provided by DET as ‘useful’ or ‘very useful’. These include the Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework (developed in conjunction with Career Education Association of Victoria) and Career Action Plans (CAPs) - supported by the Managed Individual Pathways funding initiative.

Career Educators have benefited from networking and frameworks that have informed their work over the past few years. The resources provided by the Department are very useful.³²

However, there are criticisms that the Curriculum Framework does not cover the primary years and that some of the resources need updating to make them more engaging for students. This is particularly the case when there is a lack of staff training and whole school commitment to career education so that the value of initiatives such as CAPs is marginalized and undermined.

The effectiveness of DET resources compared to other resources available to schools were questioned by a careers advisor in an outer suburban secondary college.

The DET resources, specifically the CAPs do not provide the student with any ‘new’ information about themselves which is a necessary component of career development. It merely asks students to record information about themselves but doesn’t really tie that information to career choices. These resources do not present the holistic approach to career development that is supported by recent research.

For a more holistic approach, I would encourage the DET to have a look at WIRL³³, an online careers resource that is gaining popularity in secondary schools. Some of its features include: a careers quiz – interest based; short videos from people who work in industry about various different careers – better than reading large ‘chunks’ of information; PDF summaries about occupations that include salaries

Information students put into the website culminates in a CAP which includes their careers quiz results, occupation suggestions, suggested subjects (pre-requisites), suggested courses at a range of Australian universities and saves any videos they have recently viewed.

It is a comprehensive and holistic approach to career development and it is far more engaging than the CAPs on the DET website. In today’s learning environment, simply ‘filling out a form’ is not an engaging way to promote career development.³⁴

Victorian Curriculum

While VCAL has career education built into its structure, the Victorian Curriculum F-10 and the VCE offer limited specific career and work-related units. A concern for the AEU is the

³² Formal feedback from school careers advisor

³³ <https://www.wirl.com.au/>

³⁴ Formal feedback from school careers advisor

need for young people to know about and understand their rights at work. This has become even more pressing in 2017 given the constant media revelations about the exploitation of young and casual workers by some of the largest employers of these young people. Many school students work in after-school and weekend employment and are vulnerable to various forms of employment exploitation.

The Victorian Curriculum has one section of a study which touches on these issues.

Level 9/10 of the Business and Economics Curriculum includes a section on Work and Work Futures including “identifying employer responsibilities to workers and the government, for example, superannuation, paid parental leave, income tax, company tax or the Goods and Services Tax (GST)”

The VCE also has just one component of a study which includes these issues:

Unit 1 of VCE Industry and Enterprise includes these key “knowledge points”: “workplace rights and responsibilities, including OH&S requirements for specific workplaces; the role of equal employment opportunity and its significance for workplace participants; an overview of the role of unions in the workplace.”

The limitations of the curriculum in terms of career education in the important final years of schooling have been identified by a number of careers advisors.

Our school elects to offer a semester based subject to Year 10 students and our VCAL students learn about self-development, career exploration and career management. The VCE curriculum is clearly more prescribed and although there have been attempts to offer Industry and Enterprise, there is no clear option for teaching and learning in career education for VCE students. Their career development takes place outside the classroom in most cases.³⁵

Another curriculum issue is the concentration of career development education in the final years of school – Years 10-12. Recent research has found that career aspirations are formed by students as early as nine years of age and that aspirations reflecting differences in SES background can be identified amongst students in Year 4. A study of the career aspirations of students in Years 4, 6, 8 and 10 concluded that age-appropriate forms of career education should be included in the primary school curriculum.

We are not advocating a simple replication of dominant approaches to careers education in the primary school but there might be value in discussions focused on motivations, pathways, and options. From as early as Year 4, the vast majority of students expressed interest in ‘real’ occupations. Most did so with a reasonable level of certainty (71 % certain, or 92 % tentative or certain) and mostly their career aspirations were classified as middle to high prestige.³⁶

Another study emphasised the need for school-level policies which develop student career knowledge in the early years of high school rather than waiting until Years 10 - 12.

While as early as in Year 9 at least three-quarters of students who want to work in one of the managerial or professional occupations also plan studying for a bachelor degree, a small proportion report educational plans inconsistent with professional

³⁵ Formal feedback from school careers advisor

³⁶ Jennifer Gore, Kathryn Holmes, Max Smith, Erica Southgate and Jim Albright (2015), *Socioeconomic status and the career aspirations of Australian school students: Testing enduring assumptions*, The Australian Educational Researcher, April 2015, Volume 42, Issue 2, pp 155–177
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13384-015-0172-5>

and managerial employment.³⁷

Work Experience

Work experience is identified in the CICA-McCrindle 2016 survey of career practitioners in schools as one of the most effective forms of careers development. However, its implementation can be difficult. Two key issues in the formal feedback we received from careers advisors about this activity were the availability of work experience in particular locations, catering for particular (“difficult”) students and the administrative burden involved.

*Finding work experience for my Year 10s can be a challenge as there are only so many businesses willing and able to take on students and we have approx. 10 secondary schools all trying to offer work experience. Often employers will say that they have had several students over the weeks and need a break!*³⁸

*I’m also often asked to perform miracles, such as “we have this student who needs to be on a part time program so we want to get him/her one day a week of work experience in XXX industry”. It’s very tough to convince an employer to take on “difficult” kids.*³⁹

Schools with successful work experience programs express concern about the large amount of administration and accompanying workload they involve.

*Work Experience alone has a tremendous amount of paperwork attached to it. It requires data entry and photocopying and is very time consuming. While we support the Child Safe initiatives, this has created significant challenges for the college to check employers – especially given the number of students taking up the opportunity of both Work Experience and Structured Workplace Learning*⁴⁰

Rural Issues

The difficulties of implementing career education in metropolitan schools are amplified when these same problems are examined in schools in rural areas. A study of over 700 students in Years 7-12 in NSW found that “career uncertainty” was linked to location and job availability. “Higher proportions of students located in urban schools were certain of their future career, whereas students from outer-metropolitan and rural schools were much less certain.”⁴¹

A 2012 report by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) found that rural students:

- were less likely to have attended open days, used the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre guide or job seeker websites
- more commonly reported that they had not used any information source
- more commonly cited their parents as influential
- were less likely to aspire to university than metropolitan students
- were twice as likely to have difficulty finding information on course costs

³⁷ Joanna Sikora and Lawrence Saha (2011), *Lost talent? The occupational ambitions and attainments of young Australians*, NCVER p.41 <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED514894.pdf>

³⁸ Formal feedback from school careers advisor

³⁹ Formal feedback from school careers advisor

⁴⁰ Formal feedback from school careers advisor

⁴¹ Galliot (2015) op cit.

- more commonly rated cost as an influence on their decision.⁴²

The various documented forms of disadvantage which are evident in rural areas, which arise from a range of interrelated economic, geographic and social factors, clearly influence the nature and extent of careers education in these localities. For example, the educational outcomes for students in non-metropolitan schools are significantly below those for students in metropolitan areas. This can be seen in the results of international testing such as the 2015 PISA tests where students from metropolitan schools were between one and two years ahead of students in regional and remote schools in science, reading and mathematical literacy. A large achievement gap can also be found in NAPLAN results. In addition, students from non-metropolitan schools are also less likely to complete senior secondary education or enrol in tertiary education.⁴³

It should also be noted that low socioeconomic status (SES) students are overrepresented in non-metropolitan schools whilst high SES students are underrepresented. Despite this imbalance, even when student SES is controlled, the achievement differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan students (measured by standardised tests) remains.⁴⁴

Given that non-metropolitan students are even more likely to be in government schools than their metropolitan counterparts, an important first step in improving educational outcomes, and therefore the career prospects, for students in regional, rural and remote communities is for the Commonwealth to increase its support for government schools. Commonwealth funding actually based on the level of need that exists in schools rather than an arbitrary division of funding drawn along school sector lines would go a long way to supporting regional, rural and remote schools in addressing the gap in educational outcomes.

The feedback we received from careers advisors and teachers in rural schools about the career needs of their students and how to address them emphasized the difficulties of being so far away from things taken for granted in metropolitan areas such as university open days and careers expos and the lack of availability of public transport. Rural students do not get the same access and exposure to the wide variety of career options and pathways. Allied to this, are the limitations on subject choice for students wanting to follow a specific pathway. Another problem raised by some teachers is the barriers to student participation in work experience due to factors such as availability of placements and cost. One careers advisor observed: "One week of work experience away from home is very expensive for families." Careers advisors/teachers stressed the need for more funding so that students were able to attend open days, careers expos etc. in the major centres.

A VAGO report in 2014 (*Access to Education for Rural Students*) identified the same areas of concern and many of the same solutions as careers advisors and teachers identified in 2017.

The lack of availability and access to quality education facilities in close proximity to rural populations impedes participation and achievement for rural students. This

⁴² DEECD (2012), *Client Choices in Vocational Education and Training* cited in *Access to education for rural students*, VAGO, April 2014, p.31
<https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20140403-Rural-Students.pdf>

⁴³ Halsey, J. (2017). Independent Review into Regional Rural and Remote Education-Discussion Paper. pp.15-18
https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/independent_review_into_regional_rural_and_remote_education.pdf

⁴⁴ Lamb, S., Glover, S., Walstab, A. (2014). "Educational disadvantage and regional and rural schools". 2009 - 2017 ACER Research Conferences. p.66
http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1228&context=research_conference

*barrier applies across all sectors but is particularly pronounced in post-compulsory education, as higher education options in rural areas are limited. Provision of public transport links to education facilities is a related consideration which has the potential to relieve this barrier.*⁴⁵

The VAGO report also cited the difficulty in rural schools of “providing a breadth of subjects and a range of education models to suit all learning types” and the considerable additional costs to participate in education compared to their metropolitan counterparts.

*Additional costs can relate to: transport, relocation expenses, ongoing housing costs when living away from home to access education. These additional costs are perceived to be a driver for the high rates of deferral amongst rural students.*⁴⁶

The Discussion Paper by Professor John Halsey for the 2017 national *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* identified the need to address a disparity in educational aspirations between regional students and their metropolitan peers. Research carried out in 2015 by Monash University and NCVER identified various factors contributing to these lower aspirations in rural students:

*...lower levels of parental encouragement to access higher education, less exposure to a diverse range of employment opportunities and general community belief that university courses do not necessarily offer a rewarding career. Parental influence has been identified in research as one of the two strongest predictors of occupational aspirations alongside academic performance.*⁴⁷

Halsey suggests that student aspirations could be increased by raising the status of VET and promoting greater awareness and recognition of VET pathways to both higher education and careers. He also cites successful programs by universities which involve the university going to the school, and students going on excursions to the university, so that they get a taste of university life and learn about the benefits of accessing higher education. Another initiative to build aspirations is sustained mentorship programs (such as the *Magnify Mentoring* program in Shepparton) which aim to support students in their final years of school in their transition from school to further study and other employment activities.⁴⁸

The reintroduction of the study grants scheme for school careers teachers/advisors to gain tertiary career education qualifications (see above) should be initially targeted at non-metropolitan schools.

⁴⁵ VAGO (2014), op cit, p.23

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Halsey (2017), op cit, p.46

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp 46-47