

High expectations and meaningful career advice

VCOSS submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Career Advice Activities in Victorian Schools

December 2017



About VCOSS

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria. VCOSS members reflect the diversity of the sector and include large charities, peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups, and individuals interested in social policy. In addition to supporting the sector, VCOSS represents the interests of vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians in policy debates and advocates for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society.

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VCOSS acknowledges the traditional owners of country and pays its respects to Elders past and present.

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Executive Summary

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Inquiry into Career Advice Activities in Victorian Schools.

Understanding different career options and navigating post-school pathways can be challenging for many young people. It is particularly difficult for those who do not have strong networks or access to opportunities and support through their family. After completing full time education, it takes young people an average of 4.7 years to gain full-time work and 2.7 years to find any work.¹ Young people are much more likely to experience higher levels of unemployment and underemployment. In Victoria the youth unemployment rate in October 2017 was 11 per cent,² compared to the overall unemployment rate of 5.4 per cent.³

Young people facing disadvantage are more likely to face low expectations about their career options, experience barriers to entering and progressing in tertiary education, and face difficulties securing meaningful employment. In particular young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, young people with disabilities, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, early school leavers and young people in out-of-home care, and young people in rural and regional Victoria are at risk of poor post-school outcomes.

The community sector is a major and growing employer but is not well recognised as a viable career path for young people. The Victorian health care and social assistance industry, which includes most community services, is largest industry by employment in Victoria.⁴ It is predicted that by 2020 an additional 64,000 health care and social assistance jobs will be created, an almost 16 per cent increase.⁵ Recognising the community sector as an employer can help young people understand and explore the wide range of career options and pathways available.

To help all young people successfully navigate post-school pathways requires:

- Holding high expectations for every student about their post school options
- Valuing vocational pathways and making these more widely available

¹ Foundation for Young Australians, Report Card 2015, how are young people faring in the transition from school to work?, November 2015.

² ABS, *Labour Force, Australia*, Table 16. Labour force status for 15-24 year olds by State, Territory and Educational attendance (full-time), Cat. No. 6202.0.55.003, October 2017

³ ABS, *Labour Force, Australia*, Table 5. Labour force status by Sex, Victoria - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original, Cat. No. 6202.0.55.003, October 2017

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force, Australia*, Detailed Quarterly Cat. No. 6921.0.55.003, May 2017.

⁵ Australian Government Department of Employment, Labour Market Information Portal, <http://lmip.gov.au/>

- Providing high quality, contemporary career advice, including information about job prospects
- Recognising the community sector as a large and growing employer and inform students about the wide range of career options and pathways available.
- Providing a comprehensive suite of career activities which combine vocational guidance, real world opportunities such as industry exclusions and skills and capabilities building.
- Commencing age-appropriate career activities in primary school and progressively building on these throughout secondary school
- Investing in dedicated careers advisors, with relevant skills and experience
- Working with students one-on-one to explore their interests, strengths and motivation, and help them identify a suitable pathways and relevant supports
- Developing strong partnerships between schools, employers, community sector organisations, young people and their families
- Providing tailored, flexible transition support for students experiencing disadvantage
- Providing young people with access to independent, expert advice about training and career opportunities after they leave school.

Recommendations

Build high aspirations

- Hold high expectations for every student and actively build the aspirations of students facing disadvantage.

Support vocational pathways

- Invest in vocational programs and simplify funding and administration so vocational options are more widely available across the state
- Promote vocational options as an equally valued pathway and encourage school to increase their flexibility for students to engage in a mix of academic and vocational subjects.

Deliver contemporary, tailored career advice

- Provide high quality, contemporary career advice, including information about job prospects.
- Recognise the community sector as a large and growing employer and inform students about the wide range of career options and pathways available.
- Breakdown gender stereotypes, so both young men and women have broader career options.
- Invest in dedicated careers advisors, with relevant skills and experience.
- Actively disseminate contemporary careers resources and information about additional supports available to help students successfully transition.
- Work with students one-on-one to explore their interests, strengths and motivation, and help them identify a suitable pathways and relevant supports.
- Provide tailored, flexible transition support for students experiencing disadvantage.

Provide comprehensive careers activities

- Start career advice activities in primary school and continue to provide tailored activities as students' progress through secondary school.
- Embed careers advice activities in the curriculum.
- Provide dedicated funding to support career activities combining vocational guidance, real world opportunities, and skills and capabilities building.
- Build young people's transferrable job competencies.
- Provide young people with practical skills to help them navigate further education and training opportunities and employment.

Develop strong partnerships

- Assist schools to partner with community sector organisations and local businesses to provide more opportunities for career development activities.
- Invest in existing initiatives, including Local Learning and Employment Networks to continue to develop partnerships and support successfully transitions.
- Actively engage parents and carers in the transition process.

Provide trusted sources of information for early school leavers

- Provide young people with access to independent, expert advice about training and career opportunities after they leave school.

Build high aspirations

Recommendation

Hold high expectations for every student and actively build the aspirations of students facing disadvantage.

Students facing disadvantage continue to experience what Noel Pearson described as the “soft bigotry of low expectations”.⁶ Low expectations and negative assumptions about a young person’s capacity, from school staff and career advisors, can prevent them from exploring post-school options. It can also influence their subject choices and may contribute to early school leaving.

Pearson referred to Aboriginal young people, but equally applies to students with disability⁷ or chronic illness,⁸ students from low-income families,⁹ those living in rural areas,¹⁰ and children in out-of-home-care.¹¹ For example, VCOSS members advise both mainstream and specialist schools often assume the best or only option for a student with disability is to transition to an Australian Disability Enterprise. We were told this is particularly true for students with intellectual disability. Young people with disability also report being denied opportunities to undertake work experience, missing out on career planning and the chance to complete a year 12 qualification.¹²

VCOSS members report young people in out-of-home care and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds are often pigeon-holed for the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) without exploring their interests and strengths.

VCOSS believes school staff should hold high expectations of every student, regardless of their personal or family circumstances, and assist all students to work towards their goals. VCOSS members told us that having high expectations for all students does not mean automatically directing them to higher education. Rather, it means taking the time to understand students’ interests and strengths and avoiding assumptions about their ability based on their background or circumstances.

⁶ Pearson N “The Soft bigotry of Low Expectations” 8 December 2016 <https://capeyorkpartnership.org.au/news/noel-pearson-the-soft-bigotry-of-low-expectations/> accessed 24/11/17

⁷ Children with Disability Australia, Post School Transition: The Experiences of Students with Disability, p.33

⁸ White J and Rosauer K, Op. Cit.

⁹ Curtis D, Drummond A, Halsey J and Lawson M, *Peer-mentoring of students in rural and low socioeconomic status schools: increasing aspirations for higher education*, NCVET, Adelaide, 2012, p.25.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Educational outcomes of children on guardianship or custody orders: a pilot study, Stage 2*. Child Welfare Series no. 49. Cat. no. CWS 37. Canberra, 2011; S Wise, et al., Op. Cit..

¹² Children with Disability Australia, Post School Transition: The Experiences of Students with Disability, p.33

Young people should be encouraged to explore different career pathways, and raise their own aspirations. Young people may not be aware of the breadth of options available if they come from a family or community experiencing entrenched poverty or disadvantage. For example, VCOSS members told us of a student whose family all work on the front counter at the local fast food outlet. As a result, the young person assumed that would be their only option, so never explored their own interests and strengths. Since engaging in careers programs in school run by Ardoch Youth Foundation, the young person has identified they would like to work in marketing.

Schools can support young people facing disadvantage to build their aspirations, such as by implementing mentoring programs or introducing them to different career pathways. For example a recent National Centre for Vocation Education Research (NCVER) study found a university mentoring program delivered to rural and low socioeconomic status secondary students effectively raised student aspirations to attend university.¹³ The study also suggests similar mentoring projects in vocational education and training may help raise students' aspirations for VET. Mentoring projects in both sectors could work together to provide further education pathways for all young people, in both vocational and academic career paths.

Mentoring programs can also benefit students who may not have the same social networks, and access to opportunities and support through their family. Mentors, whether volunteers or paid, can help build their aspirations and link them to the world of work.

Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)¹⁴

AIME engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 9-12 to improve their skills, opportunities and confidence to complete school and enjoy a positive transition to post-school education, training or employment. It also seeks to raise the aspirations held by teachers and parents about Indigenous students and strengthen links between universities and secondary schools.

AIME is a highly structured educational mentoring program which matches secondary students (mentees) to university students (mentors), overseen by program coordinators. It delivers a Core Program for school students who can visit an AIME partner university campus, and an Outreach Program for students living further away.

In 2014, 93 per cent of AIME students completed Year 12 and 76 per cent transitioned into positive post-school pathways, substantially higher than national rates for Aboriginal young people.¹⁵ For every \$1 spent on the AIME program, \$7 in benefits are generated for the economy.¹⁶

¹³ Curtis D, et al., Op. Cit., p. 25.

¹⁴ Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience Indigenous Corporation, *About AIME*, <https://aimementoring.com/about/aimel/>, accessed 07 June 2016.

¹⁵ Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience, *Impact of AIME to date*, <https://aimementoring.com/about/aimel/>, accessed 2 June 2015.

¹⁶ KPMG, *Economic evaluation of the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience program: Final report: Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience*, December 2013, p.3.

Support vocational pathways

Recommendations

- Invest in vocational programs and simplify funding and administration so vocational options are more widely available across the state
- Promote vocational options as an equally valued pathway and encourage school to increase their flexibility for students to engage in a mix of academic and vocational subjects.

VCOSS members report many schools continue to emphasise academic pathways over vocational options. Too many students are not provided with access to vocational options either as standalone subjects or vocational pathways, such as VET in Schools (VETiS), School-Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs) or VCAL. Where these options are available, timetabling often prevents students from being able to try some vocational subjects or do a combination of VCE and VET subjects, instead forcing them to choose an “academic” or “vocational” pathway.

VCOSS members advise there are a range of systemic funding and administrative complexities which make it challenging to offer some VET opportunities, such as SBATs. We believe DET should consult with stakeholders to explore these issues in more detail and simplify funding and administration. It is also crucial school funding models recognise the full costs of providing vocational subjects and courses so it is viable for school to offer these to students either within their school or in partnership with other schools.

Vocational pathways continue to be perceived as an inferior pathway by many schools. Students often hold negative perceptions of VET themselves and are concerned about disapproval from parents if they chose this pathway.¹⁷ An attitudinal shift is required to improve the perception of VET in the school community. DET policies must actively promote and support vocational options as an equal pathway, both during school and post-school.

Encouraging and assisting schools to offer vocational subjects and pathways can allow students pursue broader interests across VCE, VET and VCAL and explore different vocational options before committing to a career pathway. Enabling students to pursue subjects of genuine interest can increase their engagement, motivation and expand their employment options.

¹⁷ J Hargreaves And K Osborne, *Choosing VET: aspirations, intentions and choice*, NCVET, 2017, p.2, 25.

Vocational hubs, such as the Knox Innovation, Opportunity and Sustainability Centre, can provide students with hands on experience and increase student's awareness and experience with a range of vocational options. Hubs can also enhance VCE subjects, support VETiS options, and facilitate relationships between local businesses, schools and young people.

Deliver contemporary, tailored career advice

Provide contemporary and detailed career advice

Recommendations

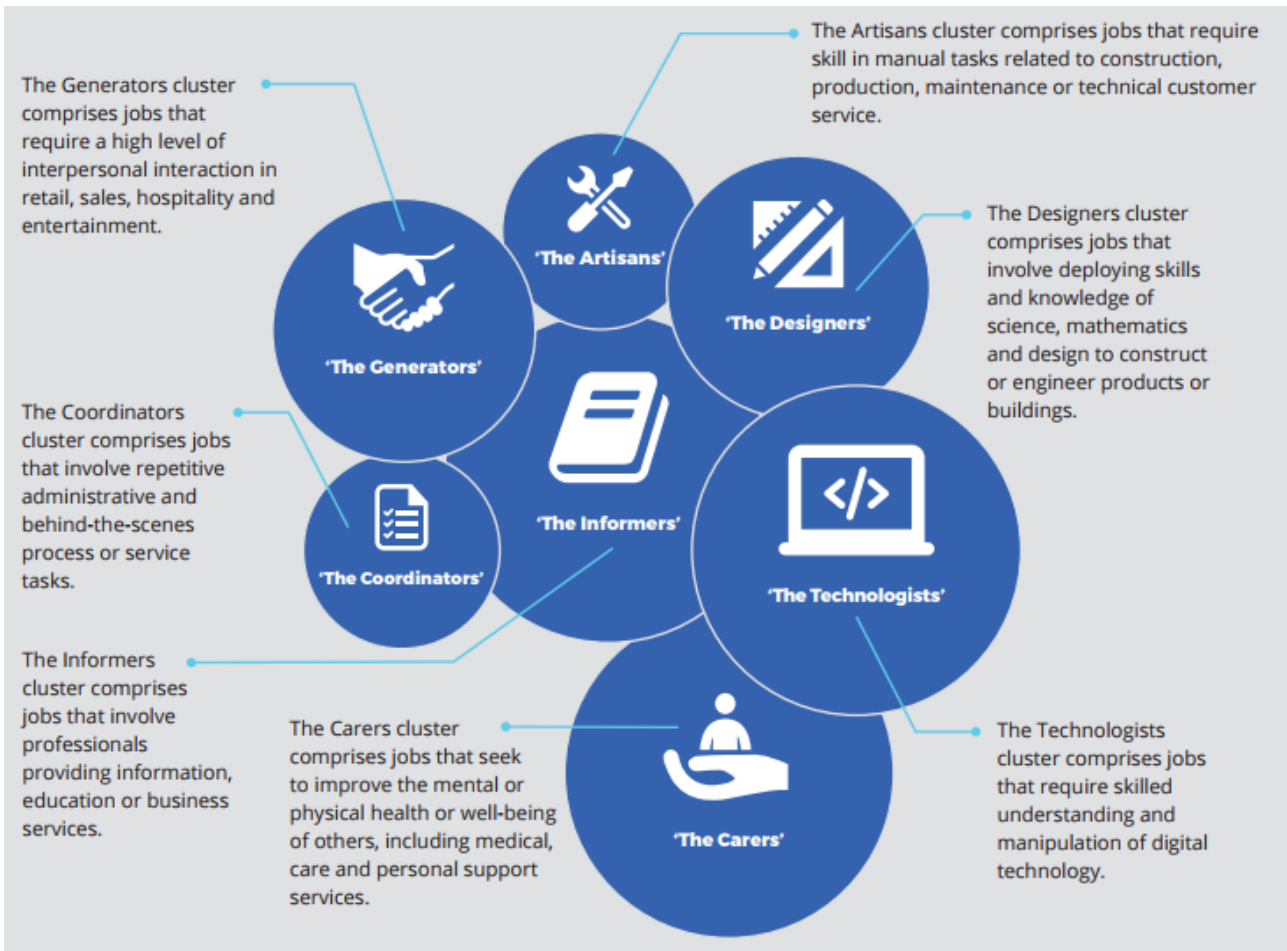
Provide high quality, contemporary career advice, including information about job prospects.

VCOSS members report career advice can often be outdated and focus on traditional trades and professions, rather than contemporary jobs. This can limit students' exposure to a wide range of industries and careers, and does not provide them with information about local and growing industries, such as the huge opportunities in the community sector.

Research by the Foundation for Young Australians identifies seven job clusters which require similar skills that are often portable across jobs. This provides a useful framework for young people to think about the types of skills they need to work in a 'cluster' of jobs they are interested in, rather than having to choose a specific occupation.¹⁸ It also acknowledges young people may move between different roles and industries and not have one profession for life. Some job clusters which have stronger growth and job prospects, and labour market opportunities can form part of the careers discussions with young people.

¹⁸ Foundation for Young Australians, *The New Work Mindset: 7 new job clusters to help young people navigate the new work order*, 2017.

Seven job clusters for future work in Australia



Source: Foundation for Young Australians, *The New Work Mindset: 7 new job clusters to help young people navigate the new work order*, 2017, p.7

Recognise the community sector as a growing industry

Recommendation

Recognise the community sector as a large and growing employer and inform students about the wide range of career options and pathways available.

The Victorian community services industry workforce is a major employer and of one of the fastest growing sectors in Victoria, yet is often not recognised as a career path for young people. The Victorian health care and social assistance industry, which includes most community services, employs about 412,000 people making it the largest industry by employment in Victoria.¹⁹ The sector has experienced the fastest growth of any Victorian industry; in the five years to 2015 jobs in this industry have increased by 56,200.²⁰

This growth will continue, with an additional 64,000 health care and social assistance jobs predicted by 2020, an almost 16 per cent increase.²¹ The community services workforce comprises about 150,000 people²² and is expected to grow at similar, if not greater, rate.²³ Employment growth in this sector is driven by an increasing and ageing population, significant social and community disadvantage, as well as the implementation of major national reforms such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and My Aged Care, and state reforms such as the response to the Family Violence Royal Commission.

By recognising the community services sector as a major and growing industry, career advisors and schools can better inform students about the wide range of potential career options and pathways in this diverse sector.

¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force*, Australia, Detailed Quarterly Cat. No. 6921.0.55.003, May 2017.

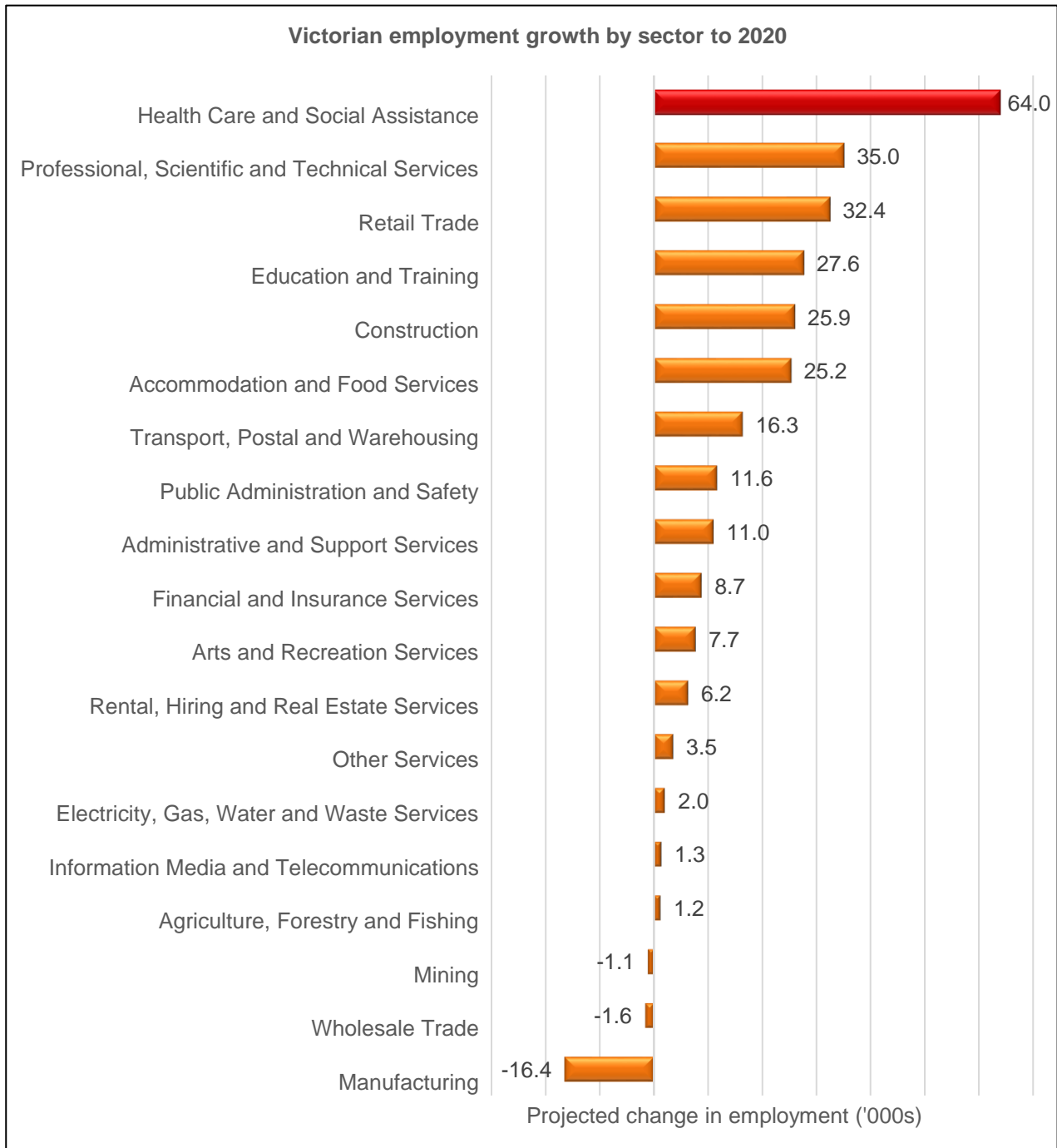
²⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force*, Australia, Detailed Quarterly Cat. No. 6921.0.55.003, May 2017.

²¹ Australian Government Department of Employment, Labour Market Information Portal, <http://lmip.gov.au/>

²² Unpublished data from the 2015 Annual Information Statement.

²³ VCOSS and Victorian State Government, *Community Services Industry Plan, Discussion Paper*, October 2017.

Figure 1. Projected employment growth by sector in Victoria, from 2015 to 2020.



Source: Australian Department of Employment Labour Market Information Portal, <http://lmip.gov.au/>.

Breakdown gender norms about training and career pathways

Recommendation

Breakdown gender stereotypes, so both young men and women have broader career options.

Gender based stereotypes strongly influence the education and training pathways and career choices young women and men make.²⁴

Young women are often explicitly or subtly discouraged from undertaking education and training in male-dominated areas and young men are often discouraged from feminised career paths.

To reduce gender disparity in education and training pathways, schools and career advisors should be aware of underlying assumptions and gender norms and encourage students to pursue non-traditional education and training pathways which align with their interests.

Fund dedicated careers advisors

Recommendation

Invest in dedicated careers advisors, with relevant skills and experience.

VCOSS members report many career advisors are part-time, often balancing teaching or other school responsibilities. This is supported by the Career Industry Council of Australia who report nationally, almost half of all career advisors in school are part-time.²⁵ This limits the time they have to engage with students and undertake partnership development work. The skills and experiences of career advisors varies considerably across schools. VCOSS members report the quality of vocational advice can differ substantially depending on the school.

Funding dedicated careers advisors will help ensure staff in these roles have the time to build strong relationships and referral pathways with employers, other education providers and community organisations. They also need time to attend relevant professional development activities. This will enable advisors to coordinate a broader range of career advice activities and have more time to provide students with tailored, meaningful advice. Having a dedicated position will help ensure staff appointed to these positions have the relevant skills and experience to perform effectively in the role.

The Department of Education and Training also needs to ensure advisors have access to contemporary trends in the workforce and the educational and vocational pathways that will lead to jobs. This is especially the case in rural and regional Victoria, where careers advisors need information on local job markets and opportunities to advise students on local options.

²⁴ J Hargreaves And K Osborne, *Choosing VET: aspirations, intentions and choice*, NCVER, 2017, p.2

²⁵ Career Industry Council of Australia, *Lack of funding deprives young Australians of necessary career support*, 25 March 2015.

Provide schools with practical guidance and support

Recommendation

Actively disseminate contemporary careers resources and information about additional supports available to help students successfully transition.

VCOSS members also report career advisors are often unaware of the various programs and supports available to assist students in the post-school transition, for example the transition support for young people with a disability including the Futures for Young Adults (FFYA) funding and the Transition to Employment (TTE) funding. FFYA can be used to develop school leaver's independence and TTE can be used to support young people with disability to identify their employment goals and work preferences.²⁶ This means young people may miss out on effective transition supports.

The Department of Education and Training could take a stronger role in actively disseminating practical, contemporary careers resources. This includes education and training pathways and financial and practical assistance available to schools and young people to support successful transitions. VCOSS members report DET previously provided career advisors with more practical support at the local level, under the former department's nine-region structure. Recent investment in the additional 150 DET regional staff could help provide local, practical assistance to schools.

Providing a core suite of information to all schools can help students access more consistent information about potential pathways and supports, and enable career advisors to spend more time and effort on developing local relationships and providing tailored guidance to students.

²⁶ Department of Health and Human Services, *Transition support for young people with a disability leaving school (incorporating Futures for Young Adults and Transition to Employment): guidelines*, <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies.-guidelines-and-legislation/transition-support-for-young-people-with-a-disability-leaving-school-incorporating-futures-for-young-adults-and-transition-to-employment-guidelines>, accessed 23 November 2017.

Provide students with individualised guidance and support

Recommendations

- Work with students one-on-one to explore their interests, strengths and motivation, and help them identify a suitable pathways and relevant supports
- Provide tailored, flexible transition support for students experiencing disadvantage.

VCOSS members report vocational guidance can be generic and limited. There is an over-reliance on tools which students self-complete to help identify potential vocations, without time to talk through individual interests, strengths and motivations. Providing students with one-on-one assistance from an experienced careers advisor can help students identify and explore their options and suitable pathways. It can also help identify students who may require more assistance and to link them in with appropriate support.

VCOSS members report some of the messages about career options place pressure on students to decide on a particular occupation or feel they have to take a linear career pathway. This can be particularly problematic for students facing disadvantage, such as young people leaving care, who may not in a ready or able to engage in further education or training following school but may wish to return in a couple of years when housing and other leaving care issues are better resolved.

Career advisors should convey the various options and pathways and communicate that it is acceptable to complete these in a different order. A broader conversation about a students' general areas of interest and the potential pathways to enter those fields would be more useful.

Some children and young people will require more support to successfully transition from secondary school to further education, training or employment. Some cohorts of young people are more likely to experience barriers to successfully navigating post-school options, including students with disability, children in out-of-home care and Aboriginal students. Tailored, flexible support is required for transition.

Members highlighted a range of effective and promising initiatives which could be expanded. For example, the Australian Network on Disability's Stepping into Internship program provides transitional support and work experience in leading employers to university students with disability.²⁷ Initiatives such as this could be explored for students while still at school. VCOSS members also report students facing disadvantage or additional barriers to post-school options would benefit from case management support.

²⁷ Australian Network on Disability, Stepping into Internship, <https://www.and.org.au/pages/stepping-into...-programs.html>, accessed 12 December 2017.

Provide comprehensive careers activities

Start career advice activities early

Recommendations

- Start career advice activities in primary school and continue to provide tailored activities as students' progress through secondary school.
- Embed careers advice activities in the curriculum.
- Provide dedicated funding to support career activities combining vocational guidance, real world opportunities, and skills and capabilities building.

VCOSS members report career advice activities usually commence in year 10 or 11 and are often standalone activities (for example 'careers week'), work experience placements or a few career-focused sessions over a term. They do not provide students with comprehensive information about the breadth of career roles and job pathways, access to a range of real-world experiences or sufficient time to test and develop their interests. VCOSS members report the Careers Curriculum Framework could help embed careers development in the curriculum from an early age. However, the Framework is implemented inconsistently among schools and is largely used exclusively in upper secondary school.

From as early as Grade 4, the vast majority of students already express interest in realistic occupations.²⁸ This suggests younger students are ready and well-placed for age-appropriate career development type activities, such as discussions about their interests and motivations for different jobs. These discussions could help children explore the broad range of careers and pathways which may suit them. A range of initiatives appropriate for primary-school age children have been implemented across Victorian schools, such as Ardoch Youth Foundation's Literary Buddies® Program.

Providing a comprehensive suite of career advice activities which progressively build from primary through secondary school could help provide students with opportunities to identify and explore post-school options. It may also help improve student's school engagement and motivation if they

²⁸ J Gore, K Holmes, M Smith, E Southgate and J Albright, Socioeconomic status and the career aspirations of Australian school students: Testing enduring assumptions, Australian Educational Researcher, 2015, 42:155–17,7 p.171

can see the connection between school work and career. Ideally careers advice activities should be embedded in the curriculum and combine personalised career guidance; a wide range of real world opportunities such as industry excursions, visits from industry professionals, meaningful work experience and taster days; and build students' employability skills. Providing a suite of meaningful career activities requires funding and support, yet a third of career advisors have less than \$1,000 annually to undertake careers activities.²⁹

Ardoch Youth Foundation's Literacy Buddies® Program³⁰

Ardoch's Literacy Buddies® program supports children from disadvantaged backgrounds to build their literacy skills and aspirations by providing meaningful interactions with positive adult role models. It is an in-school program in which primary school students – “Little Buddies” – are matched with corporate volunteers – “Big Buddies”, with whom they exchange letters through the year. The Big Buddies visit the school to meet their Little Buddies and talk about how literacy is used in their workplace. Students also visit their mentor's workplace which broadens their education and employment aspirations. The program develops children's social skills, confidence and engagement in learning and fosters positive connections between schools and local businesses.

Ardoch Youth employs two coordinators, whose roles include reviewing all the letters to manage any risks for students and schools.

The program can be incorporated into the class curriculum and adapted. The corporate partners help cover the costs.

A program evaluation identified a social value return of \$8.32 for every dollar invested.³¹ Its low cost and high value provides the potential for it to be expanded across Victoria.

²⁹ Career Industry Council of Australia, *Lack of funding deprives young Australians of necessary career support*, 25 March 2015.

³⁰ Ardoch Youth Foundation, *Literacy Buddies*, <https://www.ardoch.org.au/literacy-buddies>, accessed 1 June 2016.

³¹ Net Balance Foundation, *An SROI study of the Literacy Buddies® Program*, Ardoch Youth Foundation, 2013.

Build transferrable job competencies

Recommendations

- Build young people's transferrable job competencies.
- Provide young people with practical skills to help them navigate further education and training opportunities and employment.

Transferrable skills, such as problem solving, inter-personal, communication, critical thinking and creativity are highly valued by employers, and there is growing demand for these skills in jobs of the future.³² However, VCOSS members tell us students often leave school without strong life skills and job competencies, leaving them at a disadvantage in labour markets. A large portion of young people have low proficiency in these transferrable skills, particularly Aboriginal students and those from low socio-economic backgrounds.³³ This can make it hard for students to successfully gain or retain employment. Embedding transferrable skills in the curriculum and teaching practices can help prepare students for a different post-school options and give them valuable life skills.

The varied pathways and options after school are complex and can be difficult to understand and navigate, particularly for students facing disadvantage. For example, students from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to experience difficulty navigating the university application process and changing preferences after receiving their final VCE score.³⁴ Students considering VET options also report a lack of “reliable, trustworthy information on VET providers” and can find information overwhelming and complex to understand.³⁵

VCOSS members report students, particularly those without broader support networks, would benefit from practical skills to help them understand and successfully manage post-school pathways. VCOSS members also highlight the benefits of providing students with opportunities to gain practical skills that help prepare them to successfully gain employment, such as mock interview training with industry experts.

³² Foundation for Young Australians, *The new basics: Big data reveals the skills young people need for the New Work Order*, 2017, p.4.

³³ Foundation for Young Australians, *The new basics: Big data reveals the skills young people need for the New Work Order*, 2017, p.17.

³⁴ B Cardak, M Bowden and J Bahtsevanoglou, *Are Low SES Students Disadvantaged in the University Application Process? A 2014 Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Project*, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education Curtin University, 2015.

³⁵ J Hargreaves And K Osborne, *Choosing VET: aspirations, intentions and choice*, NCVET, 2017, p.6

Develop strong partnerships

Promote partnerships between schools and employers

Recommendation

Assist schools to partner with community sector organisations and local businesses to provide more opportunities for career development activities.

Assisting young people to gain meaningful work is the whole community's responsibility. Strong partnerships between schools and local businesses, and the community services sector, can provide multiple opportunities to students. Partnerships can help raise student aspirations, provide meaningful work experience, enhance the delivery of VCAL and VET, improve student attainment, and increase students' knowledge of career opportunities and the nature of work.^{36,37} Businesses also benefit from skilling their future workforce and enhancing their reputation in the community.

However, employers are often overlooked by schools as a resource. For example, a VCOSS member (and the second largest employer in a regional Victorian town) reports they are open to work experience opportunities and post-school employment for local young people, but have never been formally approached by local schools. Recently, a local student approached them directly. They were identified as having great potential and offered ongoing employment. Having no formal partnership is a missed opportunity to pursue similar arrangements in future.

Partnering opportunities are numerous and can include industry tours and workplace visits, holding mock job interview panels, providing trade taster programs, mentoring students, and 'speed dating' sessions where students can meet employees from wide variety of roles within an industry or from multiple industries. DET regional staff could take a stronger role in promoting and assisting schools to form effective partnerships with businesses, further education and training institutions and community sector organisations.

Engagement with employers will particularly benefit students who do not have the same networks and connections to draw upon. VCOSS members recommend supporting students to compile an 'address book' of employer and community contacts they can use in the future.

³⁶ Inner Metro Youth & Community Partnership, *Who pays for youth disengagement and unemployment? A case for smarter thinking and for investment*, prepared by the Education to Employment (e2e) Working Group, July 2015.

³⁷ Australian Council for Educational Research, *The benefits of school-business relationships: Final report*, 2011.

Enhance existing initiatives

Recommendation

Invest in existing initiatives, including Local Learning and Employment Networks to continue to develop partnerships and support successfully transitions.

Existing programs, including Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) and the School Focused Youth Service (SFYS), already facilitate effective school-community partnerships. VCOSS members recommend efforts to increase school-community partnerships should use and enhance existing initiatives, rather than duplicate them with new programs.

LLENs have a solid track record in fostering partnerships between schools and other education providers, health and community services, industry and local government to improve outcomes for young people. Their ability to work strategically across a region to identify and respond to local services gaps and develop collaborative locally-based responses is also highly regarded. LLENs also effectively deliver the structured workplace learning placements which provides industry work placements for students undertaking a VET in School (VETis) qualification or VCAL. SFYS provides schools with practical assistance to help young people at risk of disengaging and promote partnerships between schools and community services.

Engage with parents and carers

Recommendation

Actively engage parents and carers in the transition process.

Parents, carers and other family members have a strong influence on young people's decisions post-school options. For example 83 per cent of young people report their parent's advice influenced their post-school plans, whereas only 42 per cent reported careers advisors helped them make a decision.³⁸ However, some parents or carers do not feel they have the knowledge and skills to help their children navigate education and training pathways and the range of potential career options.³⁹

³⁸ V Bailey, A-M Baker, L Cave, J Fildes, B Perrens, J Plummer and A Wearing, *Mission Australia's 2016 Youth Survey Report*, Mission Australia, 2016, pp.16-17

³⁹R-A Polvere and P Lim, *Career development supporting young Australians A literature review*, NCVET in collaboration with the Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2015, p.35

Engaging parents and careers in career advice activities can increase their knowledge, preparedness and confidence to undertake this role.⁴⁰ Engaging parents in their children's education can increase young people's change of successfully transitioning to post-secondary education, as well as their educational outcomes.⁴¹

There are a number of ways parents and carers could be better engaged in careers and advice and post-school transitions. For example, a well-known initiative is Parents as Career Transition Support which builds parents skills and knowledge through a series of group workshops run by a trained facilitator.⁴²

There is a distinction between engaging and helping families in the transition process and putting all the responsibility back on families. For instance, VCOSS members report parents are routinely expected to find work experience opportunities for their children. While some families may be able to provide this support, there are a number of reasons that some parents cannot, such as those who do not have networks to source opportunities. Initiatives which foster positive collaboration between schools, parents, carers and young people can better assist young people to understand and successfully navigate post-school options.

⁴⁰R-A Polvere and P Lim, Career development supporting young Australians A literature review, NCVET in collaboration with the Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2015, p.35

⁴¹ L Emerson, J Fear, S Fox and E Sanders, *Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research*. A report by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau, Canberra, 2012 ,p.30.

⁴² J Borlagdan and K Peyton, *A conversation that never stops: An indicative study of the Parents As Career Transitions Support program*, Brotherhood of St Laurance and the University of Melbourne.

Provide trusted information

Recommendation

Provide young people with access to independent, expert advice about training and career opportunities after they leave school.

VCOSS members report local, independent and trustworthy sources of knowledge and advice are not available for young people once they leave school. Services available outside of school, such as Jobs and Skills Centres and employment service providers are not independent, and usually only provide young people with a limited range of training and career advice. With many students not taking a linear path to employment, there is a strong requirement for ongoing independent career advice, which can assist young people to explore and navigate the breadth of options.

Having access to independent, expert advice about training and career opportunities is particularly important for early school leavers who are likely to have missed out on career advice activities in school. They are also less likely to have access to personal networks and trusted adults who can help them effectively navigate education, training and employment pathways. While some programs exist to support young people who are at risk of, or who have, disengaged from school, such as the Navigator, Springboard and Reconnect: Engagement and Learning Support Grants Program, these programs are not available equitably across the state. Their focus is also largely on reengaging young people in education, training or employment rather than offering specialist expertise in careers guidance.

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