

Chapter 14

Careers Advice

INTRODUCTION

Career development becomes increasingly important for public policy as education and employment policies seek to widen choices and to create systems which can respond to varying needs of the individual across a lifespan.

The delivery of career education in schools is seen as vital to assisting young people at an early age to identify employment pathways and thus make appropriate subject choices whilst at school, as well as in making decisions about their future education and training. A “best fit” with industry based on sound careers advice, services and support makes good sense for individuals and businesses and avoids costly mistakes for all parties.

The importance of career development in assisting young people to make a successful transition from school to further education, training and employment has been highlighted in various reports and agreements in recent years.

Significant international focus has highlighted the critical importance of managing life, learning and work in a constantly changing labour market. This changing world and the corresponding need for individuals to engage in repeated decision-making about learning and work has raised the importance of and necessity for the provision of career development services across the lifespan. Many countries are addressing this challenge across the globe.

BACKGROUND

The term careers development includes ‘careers education’, ‘careers counselling’ and ‘careers guidance’ and refers to the provision of:

- advice on vocational and occupational choices;
- advice on pathways to further education and training;
- advice on job seeking and the world of work, including; and
- advice on employer expectations and labour market demands.

Career development is part of a lifelong learning approach

to career planning. Thus, it is concerned with the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned program, which assists students to make informed decisions about their study for work options and enables effective participation in working life.

Role of Career Education

Career education plays a dual role in assisting young people to choose school subjects which will help them qualify either for particular university courses or an alternative employment pathway. With the large majority of young people not attending university after leaving school, career education in schools is essential in assisting those young people not destined for university, to identify and take-up alternative employment pathways such as undertaking vocational education and training options at school and/or through further education institutions such as TAFE, or undertaking a New Apprenticeship.

CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES

The challenges of lifelong learning and an active labour market impact the need for public policy related to career education and advice services in order to improve the efficiency of education systems and the labour market and to contribute to social equity. Currently career education and advice services are focused upon immediate decision-making rather than meeting future challenges of diverse client needs for services which emphasise career-management skills, as well as information provision and decision-making, and for services to be accessible throughout the lifespan.

In the past, the structure and curriculum of secondary schools have been strongly oriented towards preparing young people towards university study. However, as the majority of school leavers do not proceed to university, (74%, 2005 Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Nov 2006) much effort has been made in recent years to develop better ways of meeting the career guidance needs of all students.

The administrative and financial arrangements of Australia’s schools systems largely dictate the structure of the career information, guidance and counselling services offered at the school-level. As schools fall under state and territory jurisdiction, there are considerable variations between

states in the structure of school guidance services. In general, State/Territory policies regarding the structure of school guidance services are weak with few jurisdictions providing comprehensive and curriculum based services to meet acceptable career advice outcomes. Most decisions related to the provision of career services are made at the individual school level, and schools have considerable flexibility in how they allocate resources and deliver services within their general government funding allocation.

Notwithstanding the above, there have been increasing efforts by all school jurisdictions to improve the extent and quality of career education and information available to school students over the last decade. In particular, school leaders, career practitioners and vocational coordinators have identified the need to ensure that schools are responsive to meeting the needs of all students, including preparing them for life beyond school.

However, to date, there remain concerns and criticisms that the delivery of career education in Australian schools has often been ad hoc and largely dependent on the enthusiasm, commitment and skills of individuals.

Australia has had no consistent or comprehensive system of ensuring the delivery of careers advice to secondary school students across all sectors including government, Catholic and independent schools. As noted above, responsibility for careers advice has rested with state systems and the provision of careers advice is not governed by any specific policy framework – nationally or at the state level. The differences between states and territories are evident in two respects, the structure of the key guidance roles within schools; and the structure of career education within the curriculum.

In regard to the structure of key guidance roles within schools, there are variations between states in the staffing allocation of careers advisors and required workforce qualifications. Secondly, in regard to the structure of career education in school curriculum, in some states, career education is located within personal development, health and physical education; in others it is located within social studies; and in others it is integrated into a number of subjects across the curriculum.

An effective strategy for the delivery of career education and advice may need to shift away from an approach that focuses only upon immediate educational and occupational choices towards a broader whole-of-school and whole-of-sector approach. This requires an approach that imbeds career education and advice in the curriculum, incorporates

career self-management skills and learning from experience. The tertiary sector manifestly lacks career services both in scale and in focus.

Good quality career information is essential for good quality career education and advice. Information about labour markets, occupations and their characteristics and is central to for the delivery of career education and advice and the decision-making outcome by the career aspirant. Government must play a critical role in funding the collection, organisation, linking, systematising and distribution of career information. Industry must play a central role in integrating information about occupations and their characteristics and the promotion of industry engagement in a whole-of-sector approach.

Career Advice Australia

Career service provision in Australia has received recent impetus through a new Commonwealth initiative called the Australian Network of Industry Careers Advisers initiative, or *Career Advice Australia*. This new initiative, launched in 2005 will seek to support young people from 13 to 19 years of age to achieve a successful transition through school, and from school to further education, training and work.

Career Advice Australia will draw on and complement current programmes and services resulting in a more comprehensive national career and transition support network for young people. It has been recognized that young people need high quality career information, advice and vocational experiences to help them make good career decisions for themselves. This involves qualified career advisers and expert industry advice as well as meaningful work experience, including Structured Workplace Learning, and the opportunity to gain vocational qualifications while at school.

The Career Advice Australia initiative will:

- improve career choices by young people;
- increase school engagement by young people;
- increase industry and employer engagement in schools and career development;
- increase awareness of the range of Vocational Education and Training opportunities;
- improve quality and availability of career and transition education across Australia; and

- establish effective local community partnerships that provide coordinated career and transition support.

The Career Advice Australia initiative comprises three parts:

- enhanced career and transition capacity for the network of Local Community Partnerships;
- improving the professional standards for and status of career advisers; and
- extending industry leadership through a network of Regional Industry Career Advisers (located in 57 regions across Australia) and a network of National Industry Career Specialists (10 industry specialists).

Career information needs to be not only produced, but also accessible, well disseminated and converted into action. The CAA initiative must seek to maintain and improve the quality of career information on labour markets, skills needs and occupational content.

Linking Career Education to Address Industry Skills Shortages

The effective provision of career information to young people is important for both individual and societal growth, and to improve Australia's responsiveness to changes in industry and the labour market.

In this regard, career education in schools can have an important role in contributing to addressing the skills shortages currently being experienced by various Australian industries, by raising young people's awareness of these occupations, and their positive employment prospects upon completion of identified education or training requirements.

Industries are keen to convey the message that they have a strong commitment to recruit into their sectors. They want to find ways of ensuring their materials are being effectively used in schools and to convey that the materials have credibility as they are industry-developed. Further, peak industry bodies have expressed their desire to become more involved with schools, school principals and parents.

ACCI and member organisations consider that Australia should have a consistent and comprehensive system of ensuring the delivery of quality careers information and advice to secondary school students across all school sectors (ie, government, Catholic and independent). Whilst

it is acknowledged that this responsibility primarily rests with State/Territory Governments, ACCI has the view that there is a role that the Commonwealth should play in facilitating the development of such a system through provision of products, development of quality standards and provision of resources for best practice and employer engagement.

CONCLUSION

ACCI strongly endorses the premise that there is a need for stronger mechanisms to articulate a vision and develop a strategy for delivering lifelong access to career guidance. Such mechanisms are required both within government and involving other stakeholders. Australia should develop a consistent and comprehensive system of ensuring the delivery of quality careers information and advice to secondary school students across all school systems

It is clear that young people need high quality career information, advice and vocational experiences, which involves qualified career advisers and expert industry advice as well as meaningful work experience to help them make good career decisions for themselves.

In general, State policies regarding the structure of career guidance services are weak, with most decisions about the allocation of resources and the delivery of career services made at the school level. There are major differences between the States in relation to: the structure of key guidance roles within schools; the structure of career education within the curriculum; and the provision of exploratory work experience which is not mandatory in any State.

Further, there is evidence that the growth of VET pathways in some schools has been at the expense of other career programmes, especially structured work experience placements.

There exists a lack of accountability in relation to the quality of schools' career programs.

Finally, the increase in the number of transition programs at both Commonwealth and State level that target at risk youth can run the risk of overlapping if not harmonised effectively, under-serving some groups and over-serving others.

ACCI PROPOSALS

ACCI proposes that:

- The organization and delivery of career education and advice services across the country must be subject to strategic leadership with stakeholders incorporating national consistency for delivery of career education and advice services and workforce qualifications.
- There be a national vision for career guidance that includes a strategy for delivering lifelong access to career guidance involving both government and industry stakeholders.
- There needs to be greater diversity in the types of career services that are available and in ways that they are delivered, including greater diversity in staffing structures, wider use of self-help techniques, and a more integrated approach to the use of information and communications technology (ICT).
- Policymakers need to explore the scope for facilitating measures, including appropriate incentives, designed to encourage the development of career guidance services within the private and voluntary sectors.
- The career guidance workforce needs to be professional with the need for minimum qualifications for occupational service. Improved access to appropriate workforce training is required.
- Jurisdictional data related to the delivery of career education and advice must be made available to the public and subject to systematic discussion and inquiry for development of effective public policy of career services.