

# **Review of Senior Secondary Pathways**

## **Submission to the COAG Education Council**

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Prepared by: Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations  
of New South Wales

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## Introduction

Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is thankful to the Education Council for this opportunity to contribute to this review of Senior Secondary Pathways. P&C Federation supports the position of individual educational and developmental needs met by a range of differential services expressed through appropriate and well-planned curricula, programs and environments conducted by sensitive and well-trained personnel in conjunction with parents<sup>1</sup> and families.

The core belief of P&C Federation is that the education of our children and youth is the most fundamental means of ensuring individual and collective success and, as a result, our greatest national resource. We also support the concept that it is primarily the responsibility of governments to ensure education is well rounded and fully funded.

## Terms of Reference

- 1. What are the essential skills and knowledge with which young people should leave secondary school in order to enhance their lifetime career prospects whilst meeting Australia's future workforce needs? Whose job is it to make sure they acquire them?**

We consider it essential that upon leaving school, students have some skills and knowledge that are fundamental to being a self-sufficient member of society. As well as the obviously necessary skills of literacy and numeracy, this would include the following abilities:

- Filing tax returns
- Setting budgets
- Applying for personal loans
- Searching and applying for jobs.

Currently, if such skills are taught at all, it is by parents, and it is unrealistic to assume all parents will do so. If the role of schools is to ensure that students are ready to be contributing members of society, these life skills should be incorporated in some way into student's school life. Identifying skills and knowledge valued by employers and higher education institutes should be the role of school career advisers.

- 2. Are current arrangements both in schools, at work, and in tertiary education supporting students to access the most appropriate pathways? Are routes sufficiently flexible to allow young people easily to change direction?**

There is little consistency in the quality of career advisory services being delivered, and the quality of these services across public schools is highly mixed. We have heard numerous discouraging anecdotes from across the State about the helpfulness and reliability of school career advisers, which indicate that many career advisers do not have adequate knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> "Parent" refers to anyone with legal care of a child, such as a parent, carer or legal guardian

of the career market. It may also be a sign of systemic problems with school leadership, as many School Principals do not prioritise non-academic preferences of their students. More systematic investigations of the effectiveness of career support in schools are scarcer, although one 2015 study found about 66% of students did not have meetings with careers advisers.<sup>2</sup> Since 2010, the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* has provided a national framework for career programs in schools, though this framework is optional and a 2012 review of this Blueprint found many stakeholders did not typically refer to this framework or were not even aware of its existence.<sup>3</sup> We are not aware of any steps governments have taken in response to that review.

Currently in New South Wales, career advisers are high school teachers who are accredited in career education, and it is largely up to each school principal to determine how many career advisers the school will have. We suggest there should be a set number of career advisers based on the number of students in a school. There should be a career adviser/student ratio of 1:200, and should be based on student numbers as at census date each year, commencing in Year 7.

It is worth noting that one review in New Zealand found that a central theme was “to involve subject area teachers in career education and guidance through their teaching and classroom activities. In many of the schools that participated in the research, the career adviser served as a resource and support to classroom teachers. Specific activities included conducting professional development sessions for classroom teachers about career education activities appropriate for classroom delivery and actually collaborating with classroom teachers to deliver career education topics.”<sup>4</sup> There is no reason why this could not be implemented throughout Australia.

There should be more flexibility, in recognition of the fact that not all students go onto tertiary education upon leaving school. One 2014 survey found some stark differences in the experiences of early school leavers and Year 12 completers (Figure 1). For instance, over 70% of Year 12 completers had advice about school courses to reach their goals, whereas just under 54% of early school leavers said the same.

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<sup>2</sup> Galliot and Graham. 2015. School based experiences as contributors to career decision-making: findings from a cross-sectional survey of high-school students. *Australian Education Research* vol.42: 179-199. P.190

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the Review of the Australian Blueprint for Career Development*. Atelier Learning Solutions. November 2012

<sup>4</sup> Ithaca Group. *Future Ready Research on incorporating career education in the Australian Curriculum*. January 2019.

Careers-related activities	Early School Leavers	Year 12 Completers
	%	%
Base (n): All non-proxy	6,501	3,353
<b>Any</b>	95.6	99.8*
<b>Advice</b>	87.2	95.3*
Identified careers that match your interests and abilities	52.1	71.3*
Had a one-on-one talk with the school's career adviser	70.4	77.1*
Had a career and transition plan	27.0	29.3
Had advice about which school courses would help you reach your goals	53.8	70.4*
<b>University</b>	31.2	76.6*
Attended a university information session organised through school	24.1	68.3*
Been on an organised visit to a university campus	20.2	55.0*
<b>TAFE</b>	58.9	41.3*
Attended an information session about TAFE study arranged by school	50.0	35.9*
Been on an organised visit to a TAFE campus	35.4	18.7*
<b>Career</b>	77.1	92.8*
Searched online for career options at school	54.3	73.2*
Attended a Careers Expo organised through your school	47.4	74.5*
Attended a presentation by an employer organised through school	32.5	44.3*

\* Indicates result is significantly different to early school leavers (p<.01).

Figure 1. Participation in careers-related activities at school among early school leavers (source: Social Research Centre, NSW secondary students' post-school destinations and expectations, 2014 Annual Report, SRC)

In previous times, students wishing to pursue more vocational pathways had the option of leaving school after Year 10 to study at TAFE, or enter apprenticeships or enter the workforce directly. This is still theoretically possible by obtaining a Record of School Achievement (RoSA), however the RoSA in practice is simply a confirmation that a person has attended school and carries little weight among employers. Further demonstrating the decline of vocational education are reports that vocational training funding is at its lowest levels in over a decade.<sup>5</sup> Thus, for most practical purposes, remaining in school and completing the Higher School Certificate (HSC) is the only viable option for students. Consequently, there are many students in Years 11 and 12 who do not want to be there, and this may exacerbate disengagement and other behavioural challenges who would prefer other pathways. Their interests could be better served by having more non-academic pathways available.

We would suggest that by Year 8, students should be considering their pathways, and that they should be able to leave school with the equivalent of a Certificate III qualification.

### 3. What are the barriers to allowing all students to have equal access to the pathways that are available?

Barriers include the following:

<sup>5</sup> Pilcher and Torii. *Expenditure on education and training in Australia 2017. Update and analysis*. Mitchell Report No. 05/2017. December 2017

- School staff and policy makers – the bias in schools towards academic pursuits and university entry is a result of several decades of policy making, and so changing this.
- Parents – students may not get adequate guidance from parents, whether due to ignorance, indifference or preconceived notions of what their pathway their child should take.
- accessibility factors (i.e. geographic location, disability, language).

**4. What is being done well to help students make effective and well-informed choices? We wish to examine career education; different schooling models; vocational and work-related learning in schools; and industry-education partnerships.**

There are individual cases of effective industry-education partnerships. For example, we understand the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) has started interacting with students in school. However, there is no consistency in implementing such programs.

We also commend the School Based Apprenticeship (SBA) or Traineeship (SBT) programs, which allows students to work or train in certain industries. This could be further improved improving communication and providing students with more flexibility to undertake SBAs or SBTs without impacting on other subjects.