



VET career development services: the way forward

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A Research Report for the
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A NATIONAL CENTRE FOR
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION RESEARCH

CONSULTANCY REPORT

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/
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Executive summary

Considerable work has been undertaken on career development and the role that it plays in the modern working life. This paper seeks to build upon the work already done and to provide a clear model of guidelines for career development services in the Australian vocational education and training (VET) sector. We use the term 'career development services' to refer to a wide range of programs and services whose main purpose is to help individuals to gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop life skills and to manage their learning, work and careers.

Not all people think in terms of careers. In fact, many see themselves as just having a job. Typically, professionals have careers, while the rest of the population have jobs. This distinction is misleading. It is much more helpful to focus on how careers and jobs are interlinked, and how people find out about the education, training and employment opportunities required for developing and managing suitable career paths. Career education has traditionally concentrated on service provision for mainly school-aged students and young adults. In recent years there has been an increasing focus on how to ensure that people of all age groups have access to the information that enables them to make suitable choices about careers and educational pathways. Because it is anticipated that most people in the course of their working lives will change employer and career a number of times, this has become even more important.

In the past, the provision of advice on careers in VET institutions (for example, TAFE institutes) was often a supplementary role of student counsellors, whose major task was to help students experiencing difficulties with learning, their personal lives or finances. Students generally had to make the first approach and it was not uncommon for counsellors to refer them to public agencies that provided careers advice. There are signs that things are beginning to change, with providers being more proactive in promoting services and helping students to navigate career information, including online.

We have developed some key guidelines for the systematic provision of high-quality career development services across the VET sector. These are based on principles that take into account the generally accepted view that career development services are just as much about career management as they are about career development.

There are four major implications for VET providers when it comes to the delivery of career development services. The first is ensuring sustainable funding to enable career development practitioners to participate in regular professional development, including upgrading their skills and qualifications and meeting the Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners. The second is making good decisions about which groups should be targeted, given financial restrictions. The third relates to establishing strategies for quality systems. The last is concerned with developing and maintaining strong relationships with other agencies and with students, parents, employers, schools and industry, as well as establishing strong systems for quality assurance. An effective careers development service today must look beyond its host institution and promote itself as being a service that is inclusive and effective. It must have in place the skills, knowledge and staff to be able to help people to reflect on what they want to achieve in their work life generally. This includes helping individuals to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses, interests and capabilities, and providing them with options for their consideration.

This paper focuses on VET and the role that career development services have in assisting people to make transitions, including from school to further training (including VET and higher education), and into the workplace.

The aim of our guidelines is to inform the establishment and/or enhancement of a system which gives all VET students, as well as parents, schools and employers, access to expert, inclusive, relevant, fruitful and informed careers advice. Such a system needs to be adequately resourced and made available as much to those who are already on a career path as to those who are yet to decide on what they want to do. It should take into account VET's role in providing pathways to other educational sectors, as well as to work. Effective career development services give students individualised assistance to reflect on what it is that they want to do and how to get there.

Introduction

Not all people think in terms of careers. In fact, many see themselves as just having a job. Typically, professionals have careers while the rest have jobs. This distinction is misleading. It is much more helpful when talking about career development to concentrate on how careers and jobs interlink, and how people find out about the education, training and employment opportunities required for developing and managing suitable career paths that incorporate changes in life circumstances. But it must also be recognised that career development may be serendipitous.

Provision of advice on careers in vocational education and training (VET) institutions (for example, TAFE institutes) has often been a supplementary role of student counsellors, whose major task is to give counselling and assistance to existing students in case of difficulties. At times this might also involve counsellors sitting down with students to help them reflect on their interests and motivations and discussing the types of careers that might suit them. Counsellors might also administer career-related tests to assist students seeking careers advice. Students generally make the first approach and it is not uncommon for counsellors to refer them to public agencies that provide careers advice. Careers evenings for existing students and for the general public are held and counsellors might provide information about careers and the types of training their institutions have to offer. At other times counsellors attend the careers nights of different schools and promote that training offered by their particular institutions. Sometimes different disciplines in an institution (for example, electrical engineering, hospitality) host careers evenings, which potential students or the general public might attend to learn more about specific occupational roles. At all times it is the individual student who drives the process and who makes the first approach.

Careers advice is also provided for different groups of clients, who are potential VET students. This advice is primarily aimed at helping people move into training and/or employment. The clients of this service represent the gamut of Australian workers or would-be workers from various equity groups, including: older and existing workers who have lost or been retrenched from jobs; people returning to work after a long absence; single mothers who have to return to the workforce, long-term unemployed who may have never worked; school leavers looking for their first job; people with congenital physical or intellectual disabilities; those with mental illness; and those who have suffered a work injury.

The approach to career guidance has generally been very similar for both students in VET institutions and people in target groups. First, it was important to understand client needs, interests and motivations, and then to establish a plan of action for the development of the skills required. This could involve formal training or the provision of guidance in the development of resumés, applications and general job-searching and interview skills, with the advice largely provided in face-to-face environments. The search for careers advice has been driven by clients, either because they were referred by government agencies (like Centrelink), or they had independently concluded that they required some assistance.

There are signs that things are changing, with some training providers augmenting this approach and becoming more proactive in promoting services and helping students to navigate career information, including online. Such changes are being driven in part by both policy initiatives that give students an entitlement to a training place and also greater fluidity in the job market.

Career development services in VET assist people to explore their own interests and abilities, make decisions, investigate what courses and qualifications are most suited to them, help them to choose the most suitable education and training providers and, if necessary, identify possible funding sources. Services should teach people how to put together job applications, resumés and curriculum vitae, as well as give advice to those looking for jobs and preparing for interviews.

We have developed some key guidelines for the systematic provision of career development services across the VET sector, including for students, existing workers, the unemployed and equity groups such as Indigenous Australians, people with a disability and people who live in regional or remote areas, where there is limited access to education, training or employment. The guidelines are based on principles that take into account the generally accepted view that career development services are just as much about long-term career management as they are about career development. By this we mean that career guidance is not only to assist people to make choices about what they want to do and the study they must access to achieve their goals, but it is also about helping people to take control of their career path and manage the journey.

An effective career development system must be outreaching and promote itself as being inclusive and effective. It must have the staff with the skills and knowledge to be able to help people reflect on what they want to achieve in their work life generally and which includes assisting individuals to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses, interests and capabilities, and providing them with options for consideration. A starting point is helping people to realise that they can have a real say in designing their own futures and giving them the right information to help them to decide on the steps, including training, required to achieve this aim.

Research in the area of career development has pointed to the meandering and chaotic nature of career trajectories (Zilic & Hall 2009). These irregular pathways often result from life choices and personal circumstances. Nevertheless, at some point during their school or working lives, individuals may need to seek the expertise of a career development service in order to access the information and assistance it can provide. Getting the right information is crucial to career planning.

Model for the provision of career development services

Methodology

Our approach was to develop some initial guidelines based on a review of the relevant recent literature, including approaches being used in other countries. These initial draft guidelines were reviewed by current career development practitioners across the country and were discussed in focus groups and individual meetings. We held four focus groups with career practitioners from Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia and individual discussions with representatives from the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET), TAFE SA senior management, and a disability service agency. A total of 33 VET practitioners provided input to these sessions.

These discussions helped us to further develop our model, which comprises a set of five overarching and interlinking guidelines that we believe are fundamental to sound provision. These comprise: an integrated approach to service provision; career development services for all; visible, accessible and inclusive services; employment of knowledgeable and professional staff; and quality standards and systems. These guidelines are not mutually exclusive and aspects of some overlap others.

An integrated approach to service provision

A key aspect of the provision of any critical service is to ensure that it is integrated into the business of the organisation. Here, this means incorporating objectives and milestones for the provision of career development services into the strategic plans of organisations, such that the service is regarded as a core business activity. It is also essential that training providers collaborate and establish strong links with different sectors and agencies (including government and non-government support agencies). An integrated approach also means that the student must take some responsibility for their learning. Of course, some students will be in a better position to do this than others.

Services for all

'Services for all' is one of the basic principles of an inclusive careers advisory service. Institutions must be able to respond to changes in the student profile. Providers have a process in place for analysing the needs of those who come for advice, whatever their cultural background, age group or employment status. As discussed below, the approach may vary for different groups.

Understanding client needs

Understanding the needs of the client is the basis or starting point for good client-focused careers guidance, precluding the adoption of a 'one size fits all' approach. Career development services staff must be given training on how to go about providing an inclusive and individualised service, by which we mean a service that helps students to explore their interests and motivations, as well as to recognise the importance of their previous work and study experiences. It also means working with them to identify available training and employment options to facilitate their decision-making. It is essential that clients think carefully about what they want for a career *before* taking up any

education or training options; however, they must also be discouraged from procrastinating too long before making a decision. They may need to be reminded that a career does not have to be for life.

While adequate and informed staff support is essential for good decision-making, clients must also be encouraged to take responsibility for managing their own career development, including being proactive in their job search. Career development is as dependent on client engagement as it is on the expertise of the staff.

It is also essential that individuals have a realistic idea of some of the constraints they may face in moving immediately into a course of study or training. Rather than being identified as a demotivating factor, these constraints should be seen as an opportunity to identify the practical steps needed to achieve their goals. Career development may not always lead to direct transition into the workforce; it may be necessary to access further training or education to gain the skills and knowledge required to become work-ready. This is why it is important for clients to consider their own motivation and interests and to understand the commitment required to fulfil their aspirations. Helping people to fulfil their potential means giving them the information as well as the inspiration that allows them to access the most beneficial education and training pathway.

The career development service offered to the client should be based on individual needs and match the personal attributes and skills with the needs of industry. This means giving clients access to relevant information and guidance to help them make the right choices for education and training. Career development services must also cultivate networks with other agencies to help people to achieve their goals.

A criticism levelled at career development services is that they have tended to be biased towards the unemployed and school and university students and have ignored other client groups. These other groups include school students undertaking VET in Schools courses, existing workers wishing to upskill or gain new skills or qualifications, and people from equity groups who have previously been disenfranchised from any form of formal education or training.

Individuals need to develop the skills that will help them to succeed throughout their working life, not just in their next job. According to Guthrie and Nechvoglod (2011), career management skills should be thought of as being essential to employability. To this end, career development services should incorporate a long-term perspective.

While career development services should be proactive in promoting what they have to offer, it is also important for individuals to take responsibility for their own career development and management activities. A combination of publicly funded and privately funded services would ensure access to services for all clients and reduce the burden on the public purse. Although a client-focused approach is the hallmark of a good career service, it should not preclude the embedding of career development activities into existing courses for groups as well as for individuals.

Young people

From their mid-teens onwards, young people have an array of education and training choices on offer to them (Halliday-Wynes, Beddie & Saunders 2008). VET is one option and it caters for students still in school as well as school leavers. The sector embraces both young people who have a clear idea of what they want to do (for example, apprentice and trainees) and students who are considered at risk. Across these groups there may be young people suffering from particular forms of disability, including learning disabilities.

Career development services should help young clients to understand the likely labour market opportunities open to them. This includes helping them to decide the areas in which they are most interested and, hopefully, most suited. Also important is assisting them with information about the required training, appropriate training providers and the length of time it takes to complete the qualification or training.

Generally, more young people aspire to professional positions than are likely to be available (Saha & Sikora 2008). University may still be the focus for many school leavers, but VET courses may be a good option they have not considered. Career development services staff should be able to help them to consider all their options and particularly alternative pathways, should certain routes be closed to them at a specific point in time. It is also important to recognise the role that career guidance counsellors can play in encouraging clients to take a broader view of the job market. Career development services staff need to establish client follow-up mechanisms to ensure that client engagement and service provisions can be monitored and that staff are kept up to date with client progression.

In the main, students are more influenced by their parents than by their teachers and peers (Hughes & Thomas 2003). This means that parents also need to be given advice on how to support their children to explore different career options as well as provided with information on the educational and training requirements for occupations. Such advice can be given via workshops or information sessions. The key issue here is to make sure that those providing the advice have a realistic understanding of the labour market as well as of the available training.

Existing and older workers

Existing and older workers make up a significant proportion of the VET cohort. Career development services have to have the capacity to respond to a variety of client groups, including all adults, and should offer an effective model for engaging with older workers, people returning to the workforce and those interested in career change (Beddie, Lorey & Pamphilon 2005). This may include having their existing skills recognised through a recognition of prior learning (RPL) process and the provision of options for any gap training.

TAFE, and other VET providers, have the capacity to engage with this client group and could benefit from linking in with career development services for further educational, training or employment opportunities. Clients in transition, either through forced redundancy or because of a desire to enhance their skills, need to know that they can acquire further training or access courses. In some areas of Australia career development services are recruited by industry and business to talk about the options open to retrenched workers. It is assumed that the VET sector has strong links with a range of industries and businesses and that they have a good grasp on labour market trends and can see suitable fits between skills and employment (Guthrie & Nechvoglod 2011). This means that the service needs to be profiled as a 'whole of life' facility and promote lifelong learning. But, potential clients need to know that the services are there for them to access in the first place.

It is highly unlikely that adults who have been disengaged from the labour market or education system would actively seek the assistance of career development services. Beddie, Lorey and Pamphilon (2005) have suggested that the most effective way to engage with this client group is to be proactive and provide community-based services, for example, at libraries or community centres.

Recognising the needs of different equity groups

Career development services need to be inclusive and respond to the requirements of equity groups, including Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, people from non-English speaking

backgrounds, as well as those from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. In this regard it is important that the careers advice provided is relevant and culturally sensitive. Access to career development services is also vital for clients who are identified as being in need of specialist assistance. For example, there should be services appropriate to the needs of people with a disability, which should be staffed by career practitioners with extensive networks to ensure the best possible outcome for the client.

Harris, Rainey and Sumner (2006) noted that career development services are at their strongest when supporting equity groups or students in educational institutions. Individuals who have learning difficulties, in terms of low basic skills (including language, literacy and numeracy), must also be catered for. In many cases, this will mean accessing the appropriate learning support networks and specialised service providers. It is also crucial that disadvantaged groups, who may be eligible for specific funding, are given the right advice about courses and funding and the sequencing of training. This is why it is important for practitioners to develop networks with other agencies working in the same area.

Visible, accessible and inclusive services

It is vital that training providers have a well-publicised physical presence and, while it should not be assumed that clients have access to, or are capable of using information technology, those who are able to should be encouraged to use it as a point of contact. Clients from all groups (including equity groups) should be aware of the physical and online location of the service and the different types of services available. Having service facilities in prominent locations and large enough physical spaces is central to the delivery of good career development services. It also might be possible in certain circumstances to take career development services to the community, such that they are visible in shopping malls or in public spaces where they cannot be missed. Career development services with high visibility in the community are likely to produce a better long-term outcome and greater client engagement.

Students on and off campus should be aware of where to go to access the services. Services should be promoted through regular newsletters, printed materials and should have a visible presence on noticeboards, online and at career events (for example, campus fairs). Promotion and publicity of career-related events is essential.

Career development services also need to have a profile within schools so that students who are considering undertaking VET in Schools or an apprenticeship know that they are available and how to access them. Most students are adept in using the latest technology, which means that mobile applications ('apps') and websites are essential for disseminating information. Telephone helplines are also a useful tool for initial contact.

Services also need to have a comprehensive profile in the community so as to engage with potential clients with no access to technology at home. For example, this may include a presence in libraries, neighbourhood centres or even public spaces like the supermarket or shopping mall. This allows clients who would not necessarily have considered using a career development service to see the benefits that may be realised from using the service. From an initial contact they may be encouraged to begin to use the service. This informal method of engagement has been used to great effect in rural and remote locations (Beddie, Lorey & Pamphilon 2005).

It is very important that career development services establish networks, both formal and informal, with other service providers for the benefit of their clients (Beddie, Lorey & Pamphilon 2005). Career

development services also need to have good relationships with other education providers, such as TAFE and universities, community organisations and local businesses. These networks and relationships can result in career development activities for clients such as placements, tours of factories or offices and discussions about employer expectations, as well as the identification of employment and training opportunities. Good connections with a range of businesses and industries will also increase the knowledge that career development services have of the local and national job market, a core element of good careers advice.

Career development services must be able to help clients access other agencies or specialist organisations so that their experience of the workplace is increased. For example, volunteering agencies can provide useful work opportunities for clients, thus making them more attractive to employers.

Although establishing these relationships needs a high level of coordination, they are important because they enable clients to become aware of the realities of the work environment. It is critical that career development services staff are able to identify opportunities or activities that involve students in exploring and experiencing the world of work.

Comprehensive and accurate information

Career development activities should be an integral part of an individual's educational experience and for this reason a wide range of programs and services should be offered. The focus should be on individuals' gaining the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that help them to manage life and work effectively. It is essential that information about the job market and education and training programs and courses is up to date and accurate, bearing in mind that economic environments and skills demands are difficult to predict. Career development services staff need to be able to access a variety of resources to meet the different learning and developmental needs of clients. Resources should be current, credible and user-friendly.

It is also crucial that career development services offer job-search activities such as writing resumés, completing job applications and practising interview skills. Taking part in such activities helps to broaden student knowledge about the workplace expectations, enables them to acquire the skills and attributes to promote themselves to employers, and provides them with guidelines that can be used to ensure that applications respond to the key selection criteria. Those who are focused on continuing their education and training need to acquire knowledge about available courses as well as career prospects. However, traditional approaches to resumé- or application-writing must be modified to take account of the requirement to customise resumés and applications to suit the criteria for selection.

Appropriate levels of assistance

The service being provided should match the level of support required by different individuals, which includes being able to refer individuals to outreach services where appropriate. For example, some clients may be self-motivated and independent and will be able to access information relating to career options or qualifications independently, while others will need assistance. Career development services should be able to cater to the needs of all client groups; this includes, as noted above, having access to up-to-date materials and the technology necessary to make informed choices. People who are less confident about their own abilities may require specialised one-to-one in-person assistance from career development services staff. They may need guidance in using self-assessment tools and instructional materials and in accessing information that will help them to make an informed choice on career or further study. Professionally trained careers advisors need to be readily available to provide advice and guidance.

Those clients who need a greater degree of guidance often need assistance in identifying their interests, needs and expectations; the next step is to help them to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, reflect on what assets they think they would bring to a workplace, and identify the types of roles and occupations that might be a good fit and the training that would be useful or required. This may include matching students' interests to training or employment prospects, or considering the transferable skills of an existing worker. Improving the career decision-making of people has the potential to increase participation in education (further and higher), training and employment, and it can help increase individuals' participation in the economy and in society as a whole.

The need to compile a suitable resumé and practise interview skills is as important for self-motivated groups as it is for those who require more one-on-one assistance. If there is to be a favourable outcome to the provision of advice (for example, a decision on a job, or training), then career development services staff need to establish ongoing and the appropriate level of support for clients and encourage them to commit to the process until a favourable outcome has been secured.

Use of technology

Effective career development services keep up to date with new and emerging technologies. It is not enough to offer only printed materials to clients when so many engage with materials and information more frequently online. The emergence of social media and other technologies (including smart phones) enables people to access information instantly and when they need it. It is becoming increasingly important for career development services to use technological improvements to disseminate their products, programs and services in an online environment. But information technology is resource-intensive and career development services have to be adequately funded to be able to provide a comprehensive service.

There is, however, an assumption that *all* people accessing career development services will be capable of using the new information technologies. It is essential therefore to offer the option of printed material and face-to-face engagement with those clients who require it. Proficiency with information technology cannot be assumed, and individuals may need to attend courses (to gain computer skills) to make them work-ready. (This is of course dependent on the type of job that they are hoping to find.) Staff need to be able to respond to the capabilities of each individual with impartiality and advise them on the best course of action to enable them to progress to the next step.

A well-advertised telephone hotline as an initial contact point for career development services may be helpful in directing people to the location or websites that would provide the most useful assistance. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Google+ could be used to engage with those who are accustomed to getting information instantly. The internet has many web-based resources designed for people who are self-motivated and, although the self-motivated client may require less intensive assistance than that required by clients who are less certain of what to do, it is also important to offer them face-to-face support when they require it. Even the most highly independent individual (including the highly educated) at times requires some advice, such as confirmation that they are on the right track.

Up-to-date information on careers, employment and training

Up-to-date and accurate information is critical to the work that careers counsellors do, but it is also the most difficult and labour-intensive area to develop and maintain. Having a dedicated team within the service who are funded and given the time to research and disseminate this information to counsellors will be invaluable. It will mean that careers counsellors have information on current and

projected local and national labour markets and economic trends and information pertaining to occupations (including qualification and/or skills requirements and long-term prospects). With the emergence of new industries, it is also important that they have information about long-term job forecasts and opportunities. It is appropriate for them to identify projected changes in the workplace and alert clients to the possibility of work in evolving occupations such as in the 'green' economy.

Knowledgeable, professionally qualified and well-connected staff

Effective career development services need staff with the values, knowledge, skills and resources to assist individuals of whatever age, equity group or employment status. Their key task is to help them explore their interests and aspirations, identify immediate constraints or opportunities and generate with them possible courses of action for achieving or progressing immediate short-term goals as well as goals for the longer-term. Staff also need to be aware that there may be limitations in what they themselves can do for some groups, which means they need to become familiar with various forms of referrals to other agencies. They must be able to broker connections with and between staff at their own education and training institutions as well as with those from external training providers, support agencies and industry groups.

As well as keeping current with their own practice, it is becoming increasingly important for staff to be aware of changes in the student profile and to understand how to best respond to the needs of individuals – from the whole range of disadvantaged groups to new pools of students, especially young people at risk and secondary school students who undertake training in adult environments at TAFE.

The importance of appropriately trained and qualified staff is reflected in the Career Industry Council of Australia's Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners formally endorsed in March 2012 (see box 1). The standards include a set of ethical principles that should be upheld by career development practitioners. Included among these is the need for practitioners to acquire appropriate qualifications to provide general career development services, as well as to perform specialist tasks or roles (for example, working with specialised groups). They also require staff to take part in training as well as undertake continuous professional development aimed at both increasing their knowledge and advancing their careers. Concepts like mentoring (informal and formal arrangements) and succession planning are useful in helping practitioners to maintain the currency of their practice and learn from the practice of those with more expertise and experience.

Box 1 Career Industry Council of Australia's Professional Standards for Career Development Practitioners

- Define the career industry, its membership and its services.
- Recognise the diverse skills and knowledge of career practitioners.
- Guide practitioner entry into the industry.
- Provide a foundation for designing career practitioner training.
- Provide quality assurance to the public and other stakeholders.
- Establish a benchmark against which career practitioners can be assessed, evaluated and judged by their peers and by others.
- Encourage career practitioners to undertake continuing professional development.
- Create an agreed terminology for the industry.

Source: Career Industry Council of Australia (2012).

There is also a view that careers development should be embedded into the education and training experience. If this is to occur, then teachers and trainers and their managers need to be engaged in expanding their networks, including with internal teachers and trainers in their own institutions. This

will enable them to increase their understanding of different careers and at the same time promote to these teachers and trainers the importance of raising the profile of career services with students in their classrooms. These collaborations will also emphasise the fact that careers development is everybody's business and not merely the prerogative of those who work as career practitioners. In many cases, especially in apprenticeship and traineeship courses, a great deal of the advice will also be provided by the teachers and trainers themselves.

Access to sound external support networks and professional associations for careers practitioners can be increased when institutions fund staff membership of the relevant professional organisations and when staff are given time off to attend workshops and events. Support such as this will ensure that staff keep abreast of what is happening in their profession as well as developing useful networks with other professionals and practitioners. A culture of professionalism is a major step to achieving a quality service.

It is essential that career development services staff have the opportunity to build on their own professionalism, by pursuing appropriate qualifications and maintaining professional currency through industry associations and conferences. It is also essential that staff have access to advanced information technologies, up-to-date literature and adequate funding. Furthermore, staff should be familiar with reliable and validated assessment processes (which are appropriate for the Australian context), instructional materials and media.

The Scottish Government has recently issued a framework (box 2) to highlight what it considers to be necessary for the delivery of career development services, at the same time emphasising that it should be a 'whole of life' strategy. This strategy is comprised of seven key principles, which are fundamental to good delivery and which reflect the aims all career development services are attempting to achieve. Since these principles are generally applicable to all contexts, they could be used to inform the development of guidelines for Australian use.

Box 2 The whole-of-life approach to careers development services: the Scottish Government's framework

The whole-of-life framework

Fundamental to good delivery of career development services are that it be:

- independent: respects the freedom of the career choice and personal development of the individual
- high quality: it should be up to date, accurate and consistent, enabling people to make fully informed, confident choices
- impartial: it is in accordance with the person's interests and is not influenced by the provider, institutional or funding interests
- informed: it should be based on a detailed knowledge of the changing labour and learning markets and emerging opportunities for career development
- supportive of equal opportunity: it will promote equality
- confidential: the individual's right to privacy in terms of their personal information and to know with whom, and to what end, it will be shared will be balanced with the need to share information in appropriate circumstances
- holistic: individual needs and circumstances will be taken into account, with career information needs and guidance forming part of a wider package of support where appropriate.

Source: Scottish Government (2011).

Collaborative networks with industry and other agencies

As noted, career development services staff must foster and maintain strong formal and informal links with local industry (especially important in regional areas) to increase their knowledge and understanding of the employment opportunities available in local areas. This will also help them to identify skills gaps and opportunities for work experience. Networks may include employers in the private and public sectors and voluntary agencies, as well as teachers, trainers and learning partners. For small providers with little capacity in their own right to offer career development services, it is important to build networks with other providers with established services. This will enable smaller providers to confidently refer their clients to suitable services. Industry skills councils may also play a role in the provision of career advisory services. AgriFood Skills Australia has recently introduced a program aimed at supporting both students and existing workers to develop skills and knowledge required for new job roles (AgriFood Skills Australia 2012).

Quality systems and standards for service provision

The inclusion of a set of quality service systems and quality assurance processes is essential in a comprehensive and career development effective service, while a high-quality service is much more likely if it is embedded in the strategic business plans of the delivering VET institution. Only by aligning career development services with the day-to-day business of a provider can we be sure that it will become identified as core business rather than an 'add on' feature.

Quality standards for service planning

A quality career development service must incorporate the provision of a combination of electronic and face-to-face support. The service should have the capacity to offer a range of choices and advice to different client groups and it should be compliant with regulatory, professional and organisational standards, including those of the Australian Skills Quality Authority or relevant state regulators and related professional bodies. A quality career development service should be able to identify any gaps in its system, and the service on offer should be relevant, current and appropriate. It is vital that the service provided adheres to strict confidentiality guidelines.

The service needs to guarantee rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes that are transparent to clients and staff and which can be supported by robust evidence of performance against predetermined indicators. The outcomes from this exercise should then be used to further improve the services provided, and this should be a continuous activity. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2010) has noted that career development services suffer from a lack of evidence, which prevents the measurement of the effectiveness of the services; the OECD also points to a lack of evaluation of the services.

Halliday-Wynes, Beddie and Saunders (2008) are of the view that the collection of data would help to improve the future design and planning of delivery. Data on uptake, service quality and the destination of clients accessing the service are vital. Additional information that may be useful to collect includes the categories of groups accessing career development services and their short- or long-term aims. There are limitations in collecting information, and it is acknowledged that, to maintain accuracy, such an undertaking involves a great deal of work. Gathering information would become the responsibility of the professional, but if it were collated consistently it could be used as part of the official monitoring and evaluation process of the service.

It may also be useful for career development services to have the ability to gather feedback from clients, which again could be used to maintain and improve standards. Comment should be welcomed and recorded at various stages throughout the process, and, where appropriate, action taken. Examples of good practice could also be used as an incentive to help raise industry standards. These could be used in conjunction with a structured framework of quality measures or indicators to allow career development services to monitor their performance.

Quality control mechanisms need to be in place to confirm the accuracy and currency of information about educational courses, training and industry being provided by career development services.

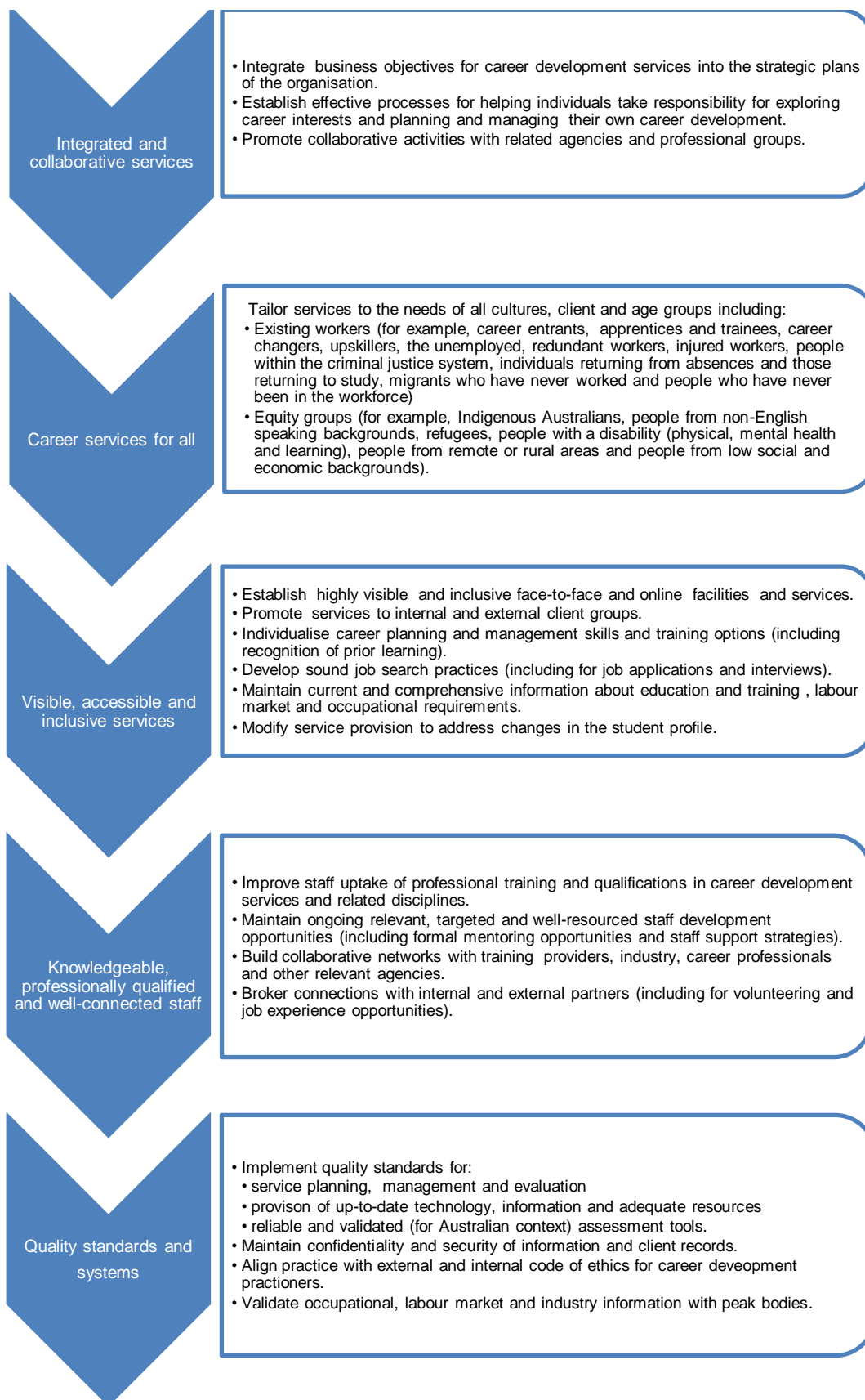
Implications for VET providers

There are four major implications for VET providers when it comes to the delivery of career development services. The first is ensuring sustainable funding to enable career development practitioners to participate in regular professional development, including the upgrading of skills and qualifications. The second is making good decisions about which groups should be targeted given financial restrictions. The third relates to establishing strategies for quality systems. The last concerns the development and maintenance of strong relationships with other agencies, students, parents, employers, schools and industry.

Box 3 Example of an effective career development service

TAFE SA's new student services centre, i-Central, exhibits the key elements of an effective service. Its new-look 'one stop shop' on Currie Street in central Adelaide opened in early 2012. Located at street level and easily identified by its brightly coloured facade, i-Central provides easy access to students and job seekers alike. Trained counsellors are available to assist people searching for an educational, training or work pathway to explore their interests, motivations and possible next steps. The centre aims to offer an informative and supportive experience for prospective and enrolled students wanting to find out about programs and suitable courses. i-Central also offers clients access to information technology for interrogating TAFE SA's resources. TAFE SA is keen to align its career development service with the business plans of its organisation.

A holistic model for career development services



Conclusion

In this paper we have taken into account previous research, work undertaken by the Career Industry Council of Australia, international guidelines (such as those developed in Scotland) and analysis of current Australian practices to design a model for the delivery effective career development services for use in the Australian VET sector.

This model comprises five overarching principles, each comprised of a number of key essential components, to represent a holistic approach, whereby clients are provided with the advice, information, tools and assistance they require for their career journey. Our approach includes helping clients to identify and articulate their interests and aspirations and aligning these to possible courses of action. Such services are as much concerned with helping school leavers to begin their career journey as they are about helping existing workers who want a career change or those who have never worked or have been made redundant. The guidelines themselves are not meant to be prescriptive, but they can be used as indicators of good practice and good service. Moreover, the principles should not be seen in isolation from each other because elements of one may have a direct relationship to another and they may overlap.

Services should be tailored to the needs of individuals and respect the cultural obligations of different groups. This includes identifying any deficits in underpinning basic skills, including language, literacy and numeracy skills. However, career development services are not only concerned with helping individuals with skill gaps but also with assisting those with well-developed skills. The notion that career development is a lifelong endeavour should be promoted by those providing the advice as well as be understood by those seeking it. Ideally, the relationship between career development services and individuals should endure across different stages of the career journey. In practice, this may be limited to the amount of time individuals have to pursue advisory services and be restricted by the resources available (including staffing and time allocations) for the provision of services. The main aim is to provide quality career development services that benefit all clients from all groups. No age is too late, or too early to start.

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