

Committee Secretary
The House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training

INTRODUCTION

The Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) is the peak industry body in Australia for career development. Our eleven member associations represent over 6,000 career development practitioners in schools, vocational education and training, higher education, rehabilitation, elite athletes, and private practice.

CICA plays a national role in representing our member associations, providing professional endorsement of training courses across higher education and VET and serves as a focal point for government and other stakeholders in Australia concerned about and interested in promoting high-quality career development services.

SUMMARY

This comment relates to the terms of reference outlined in The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education, and Training inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training (VET).

It will focus specifically on aspects of:

- Perceptions and status of the VET sector and how this may impact student enrolment choices, employer engagement, and recruitment and retention of the VET educator workforce, and how perceptions and status of the VET sector can be improved.
- Commonwealth programs that could influence the above, and intersections with state and territory, industry, and philanthropic efforts, including any structural barriers to improvement.

The submission will focus on the key topic areas:

- The role of career practitioners and key influencers
- What role does career education in schools play, and when should it begin?
- Terminology and its impact on perceptions
- Undergraduate teacher education
- The role of government and industry

THE ROLE OF CAREER PRACTITIONERS AND KEY INFLUENCERS

Research commissioned by the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) and McCrindle shows that whilst parents are still the number one influencer on their children's career planning, career practitioners come in second, with more than half of students identifying their career teachers/advisors in their top two people they are most comfortable to approach about career advice.

The research also shows that whilst full-time career practitioners have the greatest ability to fully implement the most effective career development strategies—such as one-on-one interviews and career action plan development—less than half (48%) of Australia's school-based career practitioners are full-time. In fact, school career practitioners are 2 times more likely to have had their time allowance decreased than increased in the last three years.¹

The role of a professional career practitioner in schools needs to be better defined and supported. Career practitioners need to be provided with appropriate time to engage with industry, build community partnerships and upskill their knowledge and understanding of emerging trends in the labour market, including those changes being supported by vocational education and training.

When students are choosing career pathway options, parents continue to be the greatest influencer and are key in supporting the decision-making process through information and advice. This information and advice, however, is not always provided from an educated and informed position and can, in many cases, be based on societal views and expectations, personal views and ambition and out of date information.

Parents and carers must also be supported through programs that empower them to have meaningful conversations with their children about vocational education and training pathways. An example of this is the WA Education Department initiative – [“Career Conversations”](#).

These types of programs for parents need to be hosted where parents feel comfortable engaging. In most cases, this is not in a school. They should look to support and complement schools' work in engaging with their community.

WHAT ROLE DOES CAREER EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS PLAY, AND WHEN SHOULD IT BEGIN?

Career Education is defined as the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned program of learning experiences in education and training settings to assist students in making informed decisions about their life, learning and work options and enable their effective participation in working life.²

There is an assumption that all schools in Australia are delivering formal career education as part of their curriculum offering to students. This is false!

Currently, there is no mandated career education in the Australian Curriculum, and the decision whether to provide any career education in schools, for the most part, is left up to the school leadership of the school.

¹ [A national survey of career development practitioners](#) commissioned by the Career Industry Council of Australia was conducted in November and December 2016 with a total of 716 respondents.

² Career Industry Council of Australia. (2022). [Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners](#). Victoria.

Schools provide different amounts of career education. One Victorian study indicated that 10% of schools spent 45 min or less on career education per student per year, and 10% spent 12 hours or more (Parliament of Victoria, 2018). Such disparities may significantly affect students' professional aspirations, knowledge, and outcomes.³

Teachers want students to succeed in school, carry their knowledge into the next phase of their lives, and contribute positively to the community.

Every school must have a lead professional career development practitioner overseeing the school's career education and counselling programme. They can provide their colleagues with the support they need to participate in career education.

It is only possible for career practitioners to conduct their jobs with the participation of the other teaching staff. Every educator should participate in the career planning process, even if it is a schoolwide initiative.

Adding career education and information to what teachers do shouldn't be viewed as an extra box to tick or a burden to carry. If done well, it will improve their connection with students, increase engagement with their subject discipline and demonstrate real-world application of what's being taught in the curriculum.

An increasing body of research and evidence calls for career-related learning in primary school to help raise aspirations and broaden children's horizons about future possibilities.⁴ Including such learning in Australian primary schools would assist in addressing the current perception of vocational education and training.

The term 'career-related learning' includes early childhood activities in primary schools designed to give children from an early age a wide range of experiences of, and exposure to, education, transitions and the world of work.

Career-related learning in primary schools is about helping children understand whom they could become and helping them to develop a healthy sense of self that will enable them to reach their full potential.⁵

Early interventions can impact children's development and perceptions of different occupations and the subjects enabling access.

The Career Industry Council of Australia partnered with the National Careers Institute to create the program [Little Ripples](#).

Little Ripples focuses on the parents and educators of primary school ages children in supporting them through a series of free resources, to have conversations, helping to raise aspirations, broaden horizons and dispel gender role stereotyping that exists in certain occupations and work roles.

Career-related learning is happening in schools now whether we like it or not – it's real, it's life development, and we have the opportunity to make it far more impactful.

³ Groves, O., Austin, K., O'Shea, S. *et al.* 'One student might get one opportunity, and then the next student won't get anything like that': Inequities in Australian career education and recommendations for a fairer future. *Aust. Educ. Res.* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00468-2>

⁴ Hughes, D. Careers & Enterprise Company, Education and Employers Research – [What works? Career Related Learning in Primary School](#) – December 2018.

⁵ 1. Niles, S. G., and Harris-Bowlsbey, J. (2017). *Career Development Interventions*. (5th ed.). Toronto: Pearson.

TERMINOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON PERCEPTIONS

Higher education and vocational education and training are problematic and directly impact the perception of vocational education and training in schools and the wider community.

When discussing VET, citizens commonly infer a veterinarian.

CICA advocates for the move to a new way of defining levels of education in Australia.

- Early Childhood Education,
- Primary Education,
- Secondary Education and
- Tertiary Education.

Tertiary Education would encompass Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training and would also more fully embrace the notion of lifelong learning.

UNDERGRADUATE TEACHER EDUCATION

Primary and secondary teachers are very familiar with the university system and learning style and, for the most part, have little knowledge or understanding of the vocational education and training system.

CICA would recommend that all undergraduate teaching qualifications must include a compulsory core unit of study that equips teachers as part of their training with the knowledge, skills and understanding to be active contributors to conversations with students about further pathway options post-secondary school that includes vocational education and training.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY

Government and industry have a crucial role in addressing the perception of vocational education and training.

The National Careers Institute (NCI) was established to ensure citizens can access authoritative and accurate career information and support, regardless of age or career stage.

In part, the programs currently being administered under VET in Action target those already fully engaged and supportive of vocational education and training.

This is not to suggest that these programs are not important to the vocational education and training promotion architecture. However, despite these long running initiatives, citizens' perception of vocational education and training have not changed.

The provision of FREE TAFE, on the one hand, opens opportunities for more students to consider a vocational education and training pathway, but on the other hand, it also has the potential to imply that because it is free, it is of lesser value or importance. If governments are confident about the quality of Australia's vocational education and training system and the outcomes it provides to industry and the wider economy, subsidised TAFE courses is more appropriate.

If governments and industries are serious about improving the perception of vocational education and training with the Australian community and its citizens, significant investment in community education is required.

A long-term, coordinated, multi-pronged promotion and education effort must involve the community, schools, career practitioners, VET providers and employers as both targets and conduits of change.

The role of industry and employers in providing opportunities for students to engage in workplace experiences as part of their career planning is essential.

Industry and employers bring diverse knowledge and skills not easily found in schools. They are a source of information and expertise that is of value to young people as it relates to how knowledge and skills are used in workplaces. It is important to students that such sources of information are neither teachers nor parents. Employers are perceived to provide authentic insights that are not easily replicated.⁶

High-quality employer engagement is effective. It optimises the chances of positive results by ensuring that the right young person engages with the right employer or employee through the right activity at the right time during their school life.

CICA MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

Australian Capital Territory Careers Association (ACTCA)
Australian Centre for Career Education (ACCE)
AIS Athlete Wellbeing and Engagement Network (AIS)
Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA)
Career Advisers Association of New South Wales & ACT (CAANSW/ACT)
Career Education Association of Western Australia (CEAWA)
Career Educators Association of the Northern Territory (CEANT)
National Association of Graduate Career Advisory Services (Aust) Inc (NAGCAS)
Queensland Association of Student Advisors (QASA)
Queensland Guidance and Counselling Association (QGCA)
Rehabilitation Counselling Association of Australasia Inc (RCAA)

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⁶ OECD (2021), "Getting the most out of employer engagement in career guidance", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 36, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/fbbc3788-en>.