



**NYCA** NATIONAL YOUTH COMMISSION AUSTRALIA  
INQUIRY INTO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND TRANSITIONS  
National Youth Commission Australia

# CAREERS EDUCATION SUMMARY PAPER

'YOU CAN'T BE WHAT YOU CAN'T SEE': CAREERS EDUCATION  
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Careers education in schools has a vital role in providing information and advice to young people about their education, training and work options. Unfortunately, among the young people the National Youth Commission Australia spoke to, few had positive experiences of their careers education. On the other hand, the Commission heard numerous stories of effective careers education in schools.

The Commission is concerned that the quality of careers education varies considerably across Australia. While there are examples of high-quality careers education in some schools, the minimum standards need significant improvement.

## WHAT IS CAREERS EDUCATION?

‘Careers education’ is the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned program of learning experiences in schools that assist students in making informed decisions about their senior school pathway and subject choice as well as post-secondary education and training and/or work options that enable effective participation in working life. It may include providing career information, career advice or guidance, and career skills development. This definition has been adapted from *The Australian Blueprint for Career Development*.<sup>1</sup>

## CAREERS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Schools’ careers education should be a student-focussed and comprehensive program that seeks to identify a student’s aspirations, interests and strengths and provides information and activities that allow the student to make informed decisions about pathways to their desired career. Unfortunately, many young people told the Commission about how their experience of careers education fell well short. As an example, one young person told the Commission:

So, in total, over my schooling years, I had two careers sessions; one where I got given a copy of a resume and said ‘that’s how you do it’. And then the other was, ‘What do you want to do at university?’, to which I said, ‘I have no idea’. And they didn’t give me any options.

Jemille McKenzie, Bendigo VIC, 27 June 2019



The Commission accepts that careers education in schools varies across the country in quality. The young people we spoke to tended to express negative views of the careers education. In contrast, the Commission heard from careers advisors providing substantial careers education programs, usually comprised of three main components:

- Work experience
- Assistance with careers information
- Careers advice

Work experience in Australian high schools is usually offered to students in years 9 or 10. It involves one to two weeks with an employer. At its best, work experience develops students' skills and knowledge of the workplace and allows them to explore career options within a chosen industry or occupation.

A major component of careers education in schools is assisting students to access and evaluate relevant careers information that contributes to informed decision-making in schools.

Access to good careers information is essential for young people to make informed decisions about their post-school future.

Careers advice assists students make the best possible decisions about their senior secondary school education and post-school options. High-quality careers advice enables students to make these decisions as well as developing their interests and aspirations and align these with the student's ability and the available study options.

## WHY IS CAREERS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS GENERALLY INADEQUATE?

The Commission was consistently told that careers education is not funded sufficiently in many schools. Many careers advisors have insufficient time to ensure students get the information, advice and support they need to make good decisions about their futures. It also means that the careers advisors focus on Years 10, 11 and 12 because there is insufficient time to work with Years 7 to 9.

Recruiting more careers advisors will not be easy because the role is not perceived as important or desirable by many teachers because careers advisors lack standing in the teaching profession. Andrew Harvey, La Trobe University, summed it as:

Being a careers advisor is not a career.

Andrew Harvey, La Trobe University, Bendigo VIC, 26 June 2019

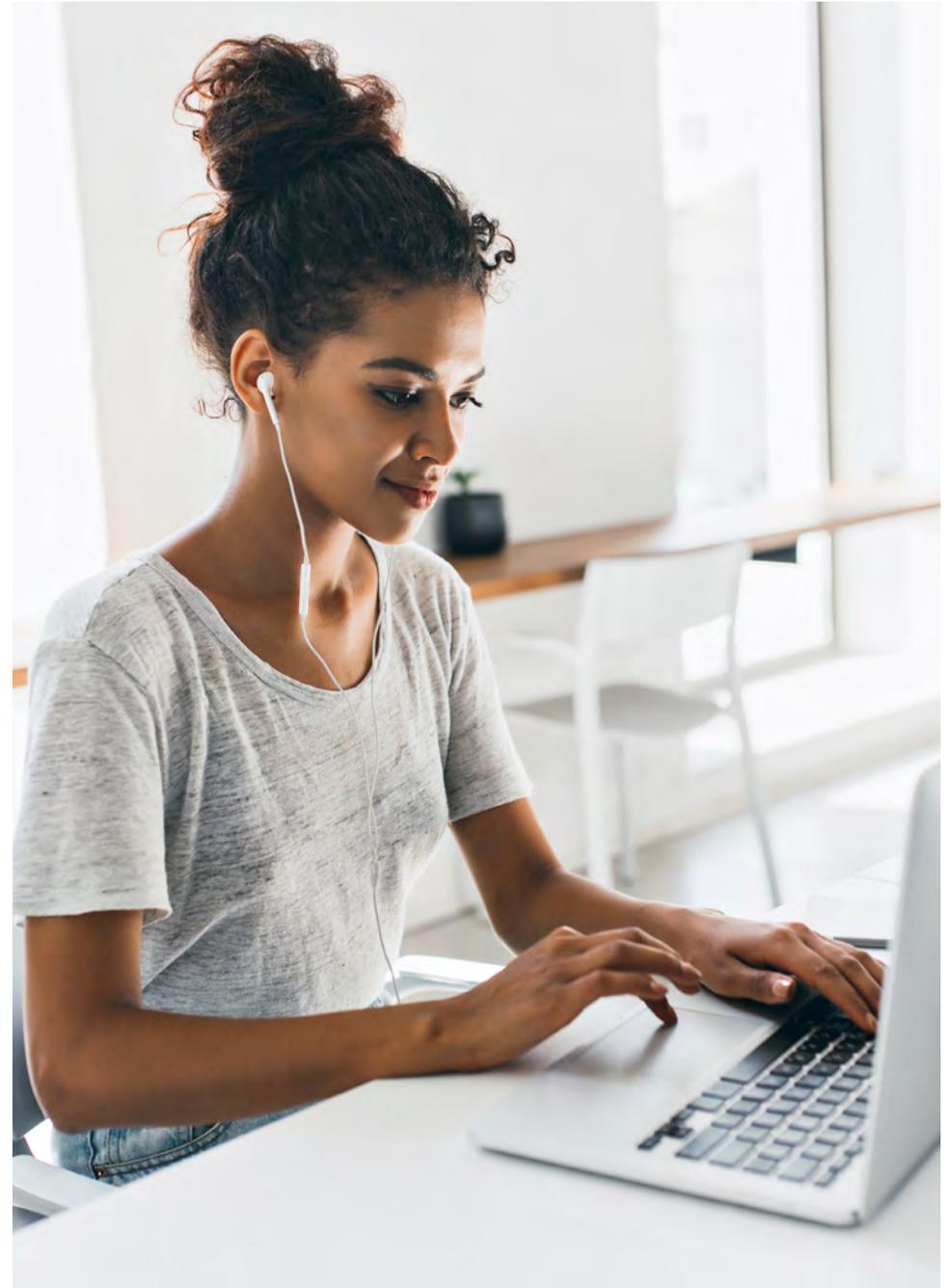
Careers advisors need to be able to engage students, liaise with employers, have a good knowledge of employment prospects, knowledge of school and post-school study options. There are courses available in career development to assist careers advisors to obtain some knowledge and skills. The Careers Industry Council of Australia's professional standards require a graduate certificate qualification or higher.<sup>2</sup> However, these standards are not always met in schools.



## IMPROVING CAREERS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

While some schools have excellent careers education, overall, there is a dire need to improve the standard of careers education in schools. The Commission identified four ways to improve careers education:

1. Every school should have a student-focussed and comprehensive careers education program that provides students with the opportunity to learn about the world of work. Such a program should assist students to identify their aspirations, interests and strengths through information and activities for informed decision-making about pathways to their desired career or occupation. Careers education should also include information about work rights and responsibilities.
2. While most careers education starts in Years 9 or 10, the Commission believes that commencing a comprehensive careers education program should start at the early years of secondary school.
3. For the purposes of careers education, links between schools and industry are usually student placements in businesses for work experience and structured workplace learning. However, school-industry links should be broader and enable students to engage with the 'world of work' as part of learning. This could include more real-world learning projects, such as the Mindshop Excellence platform.<sup>3</sup>
4. Additional funding should be provided to schools and allocated to careers education. This funding should be used to enhance the role of careers advisor, implement a comprehensive careers education program starting, at least, at the start of high school and to strengthen school-industry links.



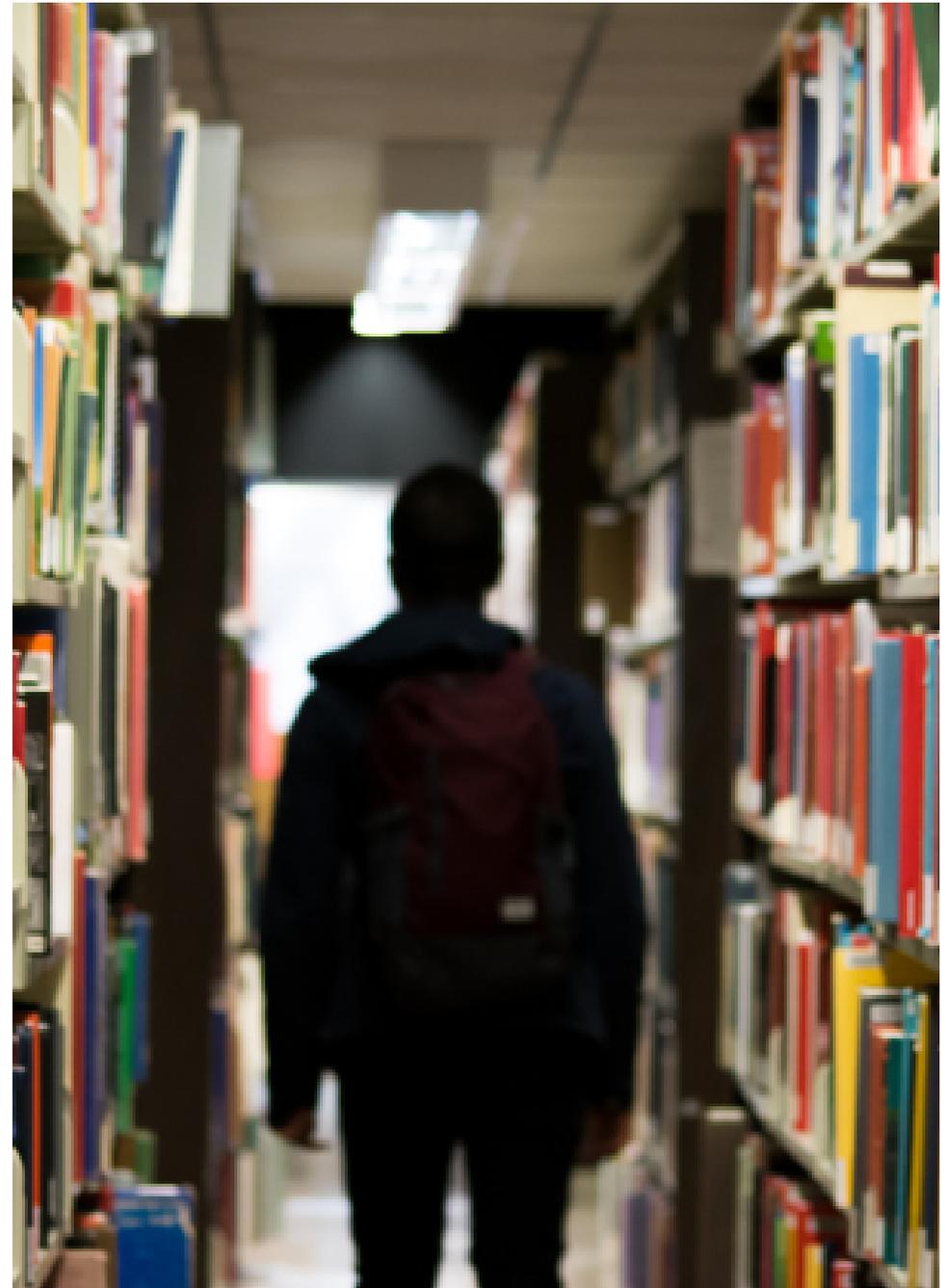
## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** State, territory and non-government education systems need to ensure that all secondary schools within their systems implement a comprehensive careers education program.

**Recommendation 2:** State, territory and non-government education systems should ensure secondary schools start a careers education program at the commencement of secondary school.

**Recommendation 3:** State, territory and non-government education systems should facilitate improvements to school-industry links and support these links with appropriate funding.

**Recommendation 4:** State, territory and non-government education systems should ensure that careers education is properly funded and that schools are held accountable for careers education by developing appropriate performance measures.



## CONCLUSION

While there are some excellent careers education programs, careers education in secondary schools generally needs improvement. The young people who presented to the Commission generally had negative experiences of careers education. The problem with careers education is that it is usually not seen as a core part of the curriculum and that the role of careers advisor is not often keenly sought after in schools.

State, territory and non-government school education systems can improve careers education in schools by:

- Implementing a comprehensive careers education program in all secondary schools
- Starting careers education earlier
- Strengthening school-industry links
- Providing more funding for careers education.

Since this Inquiry commenced, the Victorian Government has introduced a plan to enhance careers education in Victorian government schools. The plan reflects the recommendations of this report. The Commission welcomes the renewed focus on careers education in Victoria and now calls on other school systems across the country to review and enhance their careers education programs where they are inadequate.

Careers education, at its best, can assist young people in learning about the world of work, navigate the many paths available to them through senior secondary school, post-school education and training and to work. Young people deserve the best help that can be provided in making the decisions that will impact their immediate post-school future and, potentially, their working lives.

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1. MCEECDYA, 2010 *The Australian Blueprint for Career Development*, prepared by Miles Morgan Australia, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. Available at: [www.blueprint.edu.au](http://www.blueprint.edu.au).
  2. Career Industry Council of Australia 2019, *Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners*, available at <https://cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Professional-Standards-for-Australian-Career-Development-Practitioners-2019.pdf>
  3. See <http://www.mindshopexcellence.com/>.



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