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Best-practice career education for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds

Kylie Austin, Sarah O'Shea, Olivia Groves and Jodi Lamanna

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Final report

2022

Kylie Austin, University of Wollongong

Sarah O'Shea, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

Olivia Groves, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

Jodi Lamanna, University of Wollongong

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National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
Tel: +61 8 9266 1573
Email: ncsehe@curtin.edu.au Web: ncsehe.edu.au
Building 602: 146 (Technology Park), Curtin University
Kent St, Bentley WA 6102
GPO Box U1987, Perth WA 6845

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
BPPs	Best-Practice Principles
CDAA	Career Development Association of Australia
CDL	Career Development Learning
CIAG	Career Information, Advice and Guidance
CICA	Career Industry Council of Australia
DET	Department of Education and Training
EPHEA	Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia
FiF	First-in-Family
FYA	Foundation for Young Australians
HESP	Higher Education Standards Panel
ICCDPP	International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LSAY	Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
NCDA	National Career Development Association
NCSEHE	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Professional Development
QILT	Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching
RRR	Regional, Rural and Remote
RUC	Regional University Centre
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SEIFA	Socio Economic Indexes for Areas
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UTS	University of Technology Sydney
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WP	Widening Participation

Executive summary

This report details the findings and recommendations from the NCSEHE-funded project *Higher education career advice for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds*. This 18-month study critically investigated best-practice initiatives in career education for primary and secondary students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, including those in regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas of Australia. In undertaking this research, the scope of the project shifted beyond focusing solely on higher education career advice, to career advice more broadly. This shift recognises the valuable learning opportunities that are equally offered by both higher education and vocational education providers, as well as the diversity of learners engaged in Australian schools and recognition of their aspirations for both their future education and employment. As such, the main objective of this study was to establish overriding principles to guide career education provided to school students and non-school-leavers across the sector. In doing so, the project sought to understand how young people from low SES backgrounds make decisions about their educational and vocational futures and to consider best practices in career education for these students.

A mixed methods approach was implemented across four highly collaborative and iterative stages of the project. **Stage one** provided the context for the project with a comprehensive literature review and desktop audit of current practice. **Stage two** involved qualitative interviews and surveys with current students, parents and stakeholders in the provision of career education. The findings from the literature review, desktop audit and qualitative interviews and surveys informed the development of a draft set of best practice principles. During **stage three**, five[1] Career Development Learning (CDL) programs were designed, implemented and evaluated according to the draft best-practice principles to consider the types of programs that might best support students. Finally**, stage four** drew together the findings from each of the previous stages to create a set of recommendations and further develop the Best-Practice Principles[2] for the education sector.

Several key themes emerged from the research that informed the recommendations:

Theme 1 — Effective career education: A game of chance. The research found a mismatch between the approach to career advice and student expectations of career services. As a result of this mismatch, students could miss out and fall through the cracks so quality career education was dependent on opportunity rather than strategy.

Theme 2 — Key influencers of career education: Ownership and blame. Data collected from students, parents and teachers confirmed that each group is indeed a key influencer of a student's career decisions, and each can be both an enabler and a disabler of effective career education. What was also revealed was that some groups acutely perceive the disabling tendencies of others, seeing another "influencer" group as problematic for effective career education. This has resulted in a culture of blame and a lack of ownership for career education within educational settings, such as primary and secondary schools.

Theme 3 — Careers partnership work: Strengths and challenges of two approaches. Two main approaches to schools working in partnership with universities, not-for-profit organisations, vocational education providers, government agencies and industry bodies were revealed. Despite the prevalence of 'hub-and-spoke' approaches, a collaborative,

[1] Due to COVID-19 restrictions on incursions in schools, the implementation and evaluation of the fifth program was delayed and is not included in this report. However, the partnership work that occurred in the design of the program informed the findings and recommendations of the project.

[2] The Best-Practice Principles are presented separately to this report and can be accessed here.

multi-stakeholder partnership approach is best able to support students' achievement of their educational and vocational goals.

Theme 4 — Pathways and transitions: The need to support choice and flexibility. Student participants in this research described diverse and individualised school-to-work routes as well as a need to be flexible or "work it out" due to disruptions or changes. These disruptions included school subject availability, illness, aspiration uncertainty, and a sense of being pushed and pulled. Students also discussed how they may have been funnelled into particular pathways but valued exploration of multiple options and opportunities.

Theme 5 — The unique experiences of students from low SES backgrounds in regional, rural and remote areas. Participants reflected on how work and training opportunities in smaller communities can be informal and intimate, requiring networking and specific skills. They also referenced the scarcity and competitiveness of employment opportunities and the deep push-pull to stay in or leave their communities.

This report acknowledges the extensive work that has previously been undertaken in investigating the provision of career education in Australia, as well as the steps already undertaken by the Federal Government, including the establishment of the National Careers Institute (NCI) to address the challenges in the Australian career education context. Further information about these studies and the NCI is included in the proceeding report. The following five key recommendations aim to build on existing practices and aim to continue to enhance the career provision for students from LSES backgrounds, students from RRR areas and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. By improving the career provision for these target student cohorts, it will be ultimately improve the national career provision for all students Each of these recommendations are further expanded upon in the recommendations section.

Recommendation 1: The Department of Education, (DoE)'s National Careers Institute to implement the concept and term Career Development Learning (CDL) consistently across Australian career-related activities to usefully clarify, connect and direct endeavours across sectors and political and geographic boundaries.

Recommendation 2: The DESE's National Careers Institute to develop a plan for CDL that clearly articulates the responsibilities of schools, parents and supporters and external stakeholder groups across the student life cycle.

Recommendation 3: The DESE's National Careers Institute to work collaboratively with state-based education departments to enhance the quality of CDL in schools with the goal of enabling students from LSES backgrounds, RRR areas and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, to make more informed decisions about their futures.

Recommendation 4: The DESE's National Careers Institute to define effective partnership practices within the context of CDL, identifying the need for partnerships to be led by "impartial" stakeholders, such as Regional University Centres (RUCs) or other independent bodies.

Recommendation 5: Schools and key stakeholders, such as universities, vocational education providers, industry and community organisations, to design CDL programs in ways that are student-centred and place-based, and reflect the non-linear journeys that characterise the world of work.

Recommendations

The five key recommendations derived from this study are outlined below.

Recommendation 1: The Department of Education (DoE)'s National Careers Institute to implement the concept and term Career Development Learning (CDL) consistently across Australian career-related activities to usefully clarify, connect and direct endeavours across sectors and political and geographic boundaries.

To meet the diverse needs of students from low SES backgrounds, CDL must be underpinned by practices that:

1. adopt a consistent, long-term, life cycle approach to CDL to give young people the earliest possible introduction to career development learning
2. develop curriculum that explicitly teaches students the "hidden discourses" to navigate the world of work, and to increase students' understandings of self, opportunities available and skills needed to effectively navigate a successful career and life
3. increase access to CDL by ensuring that it is intentionally planned across the student life cycle to ensure equity, particularly for students who may have limited opportunities for "informal" CDL opportunities.

Recommendation 2: The DESE's National Careers Institute to develop a plan for CDL that clearly articulates the responsibilities of schools, parents and supporters and external stakeholder groups across the student life cycle.

To meet the diverse needs of students from low SES backgrounds, a planned approach to CDL that articulates the responsibilities of key influencers must:

1. be articulated at a school level through a whole-of-school plan that engages all teachers in the provision of CDL to students
2. engage parents as partners with shared responsibility alongside the school in the provision of CDL for students
3. engage students as partners in the provision of CDL, to scaffold their understanding of CDL to enable independent and informed decision-making.

Recommendation 3: The DESE's National Careers Institute to work collaboratively with state-based education departments to enhance the quality of CDL in schools and, in turn, all students' post-school outcomes.

In order to meet the diverse needs of students from low SES backgrounds, quality CDL must be implemented within schools that is:

1. professionalised through the development of minimum standards of qualifications, professional development (PD) and incentives to enable experienced career advisers to work in schools with high proportions of students from LSES backgrounds or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students are enrolled, or schools located in RRR areas where effective CDL is most needed
2. evaluative, focused on continuous improvement and having a demonstrated impact on improved learning and post-school pathway outcomes.

Recommendation 4: The DESE's National Careers Institute to define effective partnership practices within the context of CDL, identifying the need for partnerships to be led by "impartial" stakeholders such as Regional University Centres (RUCs) or other independent bodies.

To meet the diverse needs of students from low SES backgrounds, partnerships must be established in ways that:

1. equally value all career and post-school education pathways by establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships that are led by an impartial stakeholder and include representation from schools, universities, vocational education providers, industry and local community organisations
2. clearly define effective partnership practices to ensure that all partners are engaged in the provision of CDL.

Recommendation 5: Schools and key stakeholders, such as universities, vocational education providers, industry and community organisations to design CDL programs in ways that are student-centred and place-based, and that reflect the non-linear journeys that characterise the world of work.

To meet the diverse needs of students from low SES backgrounds, CDL programs should be designed in ways that:

1. are student-centred, drawing on students' strengths, interests and skills that broaden their exposure to occupations and fields of study
2. are place-based and recognise the unique employment trends and challenges experienced by different communities, particularly communities in regional, rural or remote areas
3. normalise non-linear journeys into and through the world of work.

Introduction

This report details the findings and recommendations from the 18-month, NCSEHE-funded project *Higher education career advice for primary and secondary school students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds*. The study critically investigated best-practice initiatives in career education for students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, including those in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia. Having said that, it is important to note that regional, rural and remote settings should not be converged, as great diversity exists amongst residents and communities within and between them. The purpose of the study was to establish overriding best-practice principles to guide career education provided to school students and non-school-leavers who are considering higher education and other pathways. In doing so, the project sought to gain a better understanding of the ways that young people from low SES backgrounds may consider their educational and vocational futures, and to provide suggested best practices in the provision of career education for this cohort.

Context

Young people's movement from school to work is challenging and can involve lengthy transitions from full-time education to full-time work (FYA, 2018a; O'Connell, Milligan, & Bently, 2019). These transitions can be characterised by underemployment in the form of casual work and/or jobs that do not match the individual's skills and qualifications, and by unemployment (LSAY, 2019). COVID-19 has made the challenge of transitioning to the labour market exponentially worse. This is particularly the case for young people who may struggle to locate and maintain employment as a result of economic downturn (Borland, 2020, April 15). However, COVID-19 is not the only reason for changes in the employment market; the future world of work has also been changing as a result of globalisation and advances in artificial intelligence and technology (Education Council, 2019b; FYA, 2018a; OECD, 2016; Torii, 2018).

As a result of these modifications, today's youth will need to engage and re-engage with further education and training throughout their lives. Careers and career pathways are no longer linear and structured, but fluid and multiple, which necessitates new career navigation skills (FYA, 2018a; International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy, 2017; Raciti, 2019; Ranasinghe, Chew, Knight & Siekmann, 2019).

Many students from low SES backgrounds already have inequitable outcomes from education and employment compared to the rest of the population (Cunningham, Orsmond & Price, 2014; McLachlan, Gilfilan & Gordon, 2013). As result, these students may proportionally be more at risk of participating inequitably in the future world of work unless equity measures are achieved (Bridge Group, 2017). Quality career education is a method to help individuals manage changes in the labour market, reach their full potential and create fairer societies (OECD, ILO, UNESCO & The European Commission, 2019). Quality career education also engages students in learning, retains them in school and helps them to attain good academic qualifications, and thus is an important goal of schooling (Andrews & Hooley, 2017; Broadbent, Cacciattolo & Papadopoulos, 2012; OECD et al., 2019).

Traditional approaches to providing career education in schools through the employment of a career adviser or career counsellor have been criticised as being inadequate: both outdated and not adequately preparing students for life after school (S. Brown, 2015; Parliament of Victoria, 2018; Moote & Archer, 2018; O'Shea & Groves, 2020; Yates & Bruce, 2017). There is evidence that career education is inequitably delivered across schools and groups of students which may promote inequities based on social class, ethnicity and gender (Andrews & Hooley, 2017; Atalier Learning Solutions, 2012).

Within this context, it is necessary to critically investigate best-practice initiatives in career education for students from low SES backgrounds to ensure that all students receive the support needed to achieve positive outcomes from education, employment and life. This project considered the ways in which the provision of traditional career education can be supplemented by alternative, but equally valuable, approaches.

Key research questions

The project explored the following research questions:

1. How do young people from low SES backgrounds make decisions about their educational and vocational futures?
2. What are best practices in career advice for students from low SES backgrounds?

Specifically, these questions were designed to respond to an existing suite of recommendations from national and large-scale studies that include:

- the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) report (2017), "Improving retention, completion and success in higher education", specifically Recommendation 3, which positioned higher-education institutions as having a key role in providing career advice to prospective students (as opposed to this being solely under the remit of secondary schools or other pre-tertiary or extra-tertiary educational providers)
- a Grattan Institute background paper (Cherastidtham & Norton, 2018) that identified the need for career advice to commence early in the educational life cycle, and for ensuring that this is embedded within the school curriculum rather than existing as an ad-hoc or separate activity
- John Halsey's (2017) Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) Education, which highlighted the limited and inadequate career advice available to students from RRR backgrounds prior to commencing tertiary studies
- the Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System (Joyce 2019), which brought together reliable information about occupations from both the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors
- the Mitchell Report: Connecting the worlds of learning and work (Torii 2018), which sought to improve school and industry partnerships to increase students' engagement and participation in learning linked to future careers and their awareness of subject pathways to existing and emerging careers
- the Napthine Review (2019), "National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy", specifically Recommendation 4, which aims to improve career advice, specifically implementing a regionally based model for independent, professional career advice and improving online career related information to better prepare RRR students for success.

Research design

This project had four stages, each of which was designed to contribute specific learnings to the overall project. At the same time, the staging of the project was designed to be overlapping and iterative, with each stage emerging out of the previous one and contributing to the next. The stages of the project were:

Stage 1: The project commenced with an international literature review that highlighted the current context for school-to-work transitions and career education, including weaknesses and elements of best practice. A desktop audit, or internet search, of current career advice practices complemented the literature review by foregrounding current career education programs and providing a basis for understanding what best practices were occurring.

Stage 2: Qualitative interviews and surveys with current students, parents and stakeholders exploring their experience of career education were conducted. The focus of the data collection was understanding how young people from low SES backgrounds made decisions about their educational and vocational futures by having them "map" the key stages of their trajectories and explain the complexities of the decisions and key influencers at different stages. Data from parents and stakeholders provided additional and complementary viewpoints on these issues.

Stage 3: Five[3] career-education programs were designed, implemented and evaluated according to best-practice principles to understand what programs best support students from low SES backgrounds. In each case, universities partnered with schools, enabling education providers or key influencer groups to provide a best practice intervention that also developed productive partnerships across the sector.

Stage 4: The final stage of the project involved drawing together all the project findings to produce a set of recommendations for government and Best Practice Principles for practitioners in the education sector — primary, secondary and tertiary.

Collaboration and consultation were also critical elements of the project, which added to the rigour of the research and ensuing recommendations. Collaboration was facilitated in this project in many different ways across sectors, universities and stakeholders. Consultation also occurred frequently and deeply throughout the project, both within the research team and with the expert committee, equity practitioners and other stakeholders. The expert panel included 11 members from the DESE, the NCSEHE, universities and secondary-school career services. Of particular note is the partnering with career advisers, teachers, parents and enabling educators that occurred in the design and implementation of the research. In addition to the 564 research participants, 52 other experts and stakeholders made direct contributions to this project in the form of consultation (n=32+) and collaboration (n=20+).

Table 1 details the participants in this project.

Table 1. Details of project participants

PARTICIPANT TYPE	MODE OF PARTICIPATION	NUMBER
University students	Survey	45
University students	Interview/Focus Group	27
Non-school-leaver students in pathway programs	Survey	113
Secondary-school students	Survey	91
Secondary-school students	Work Samples	42
Parents	Survey	101
Parents	Interview/Focus Group	13
Stakeholders	Survey	19
Stakeholders	Interview/ Focus Group	113
Total Research Participants	Research Stages 2 and 3	564

[3] Due to COVID-19 restrictions on visits to schools, implementation and evaluation of the fifth program was delayed and is not included in this report. However, the partnership work that occurred in the design of the program informed the findings and recommendations of the project.

The next section details and provides links to the documents and resources produced as part of this project.

Project outputs

The outputs from this project are both scholarly and applied.

The following practice-based documents are intended to support practitioners, institutions and other stakeholder groups to design and implement best practice career education for students from low SES backgrounds.

- Best-Practice Principles (BPPs)
- Guide to Partnerships
- Case Studies of Best Practice

The BPPs are a set of overriding principles to guide the provision of effective career education in schools. The Guide to Partnerships has been designed for practitioners in higher education, VET and industry when establishing partnerships with schools, to enable quality career education that values the expertise of career advisers and school teachers.

In addition, the following scholarly documents have been produced that provide a background and evidence base for theorising and researching career education.

- Literature Review
- Desktop Audit

Document structure

Following this introduction, a background to the study provides the context for the research. This section is followed by an overview of the theoretical framework adopted for the study: Bourdieu's concept of Social Reproduction.

The project methodology provides a detailed picture of the activities that occurred over four stages of the research. This is followed by the presentation of the project's key findings across each of the four stages. The discussion section draws the themes together, exploring them in light of the theoretical framework and literature, and pointing to recommendations. The document concludes with a summary, highlighting the study's implications for research and practice. Figure 1 depicts the structure of this report.

Figure 1. Report structure

Background

A comprehensive literature review was undertaken at the commencement of the project and published online. A high-level overview of the most pertinent issues is presented here.

Figure 2 illustrates the structure of this section.

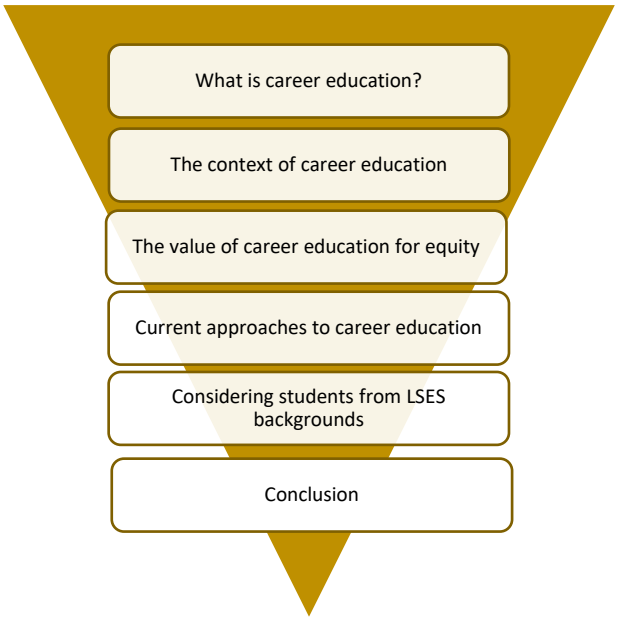


Figure 2. Structure of background section

What is career education?

There are a many different terms and combinations of terms used to describe career-related activities: career advice; career counselling; career guidance; career information, advice and guidance (CIAG); vocational counselling or vocational guidance; career development; and career education or learning are just some of the terms that can be found in practice, policy and theory, although many of these terms overlap and are used synonymously (CICA, 2019). Historically, “career advice”, “career counselling” or “career guidance” have referred to one-on-one interactions between an individual and a career professional (Hooley, Watts & Andrews, 2015), and this was the extent of school-based career support. However, today it is felt that these terms are outdated, with many practitioners preferring other terms that better reflect the nature of career activities as much more than mere advice (Parliament of Victoria, 2018).

Internationally, the term “career guidance” is popular and commonly used across Europe, defined as “the activities which support individuals to learn about education and employment and plan for their future lives, learning and work” (Hooley, Matheson, & Watts 2014, p.4). The term “career development” is also widely used, particularly in the US. Interestingly, “career development” is defined similarly to “career guidance” as **“**the ongoing process of a person managing their life, learning and work over their lifespan. It involves developing the skills and knowledge that enable individuals to plan and make informed decisions about education, training and career choices” (Australian Government, 2013, p.3).

In Australia, and in other contexts, career terminology is changing to reflect the process of learning involved in career support. In 2019, the Australian Government shifted to the use of the term “career education” in their national strategy (Australian Government, 2019).

The addition of “education” in reference to career work encompasses planned programs of learning experiences in education and training sessions (Australian Government, 2019).

Further variations of terminology can be found in the Australian education sector, highlighting the inconsistency, conflict and overlap in career policy and practice. The various state-level education departments in Australia work independently in defining their career programs. For example, Victoria also uses the term “career education”, to name their career programs, but New South Wales (NSW) has used “career-related learning” (NSW Government, 2014), and now “career learning” (NSW Government, 2019a). According to the NSW government, “career learning” describes “the ongoing lifelong process of managing learning, work and life; a process that requires the skills and knowledge to plan and make informed decisions about education, training and career choices” (NSW Government, 2019a).

This report has adopted the Australian Government’s term “career education” to refer to current career activity in schools. However, as this report unfolds, the terminology and approach of career education in schools will be contested, and the term “Career Development Learning” (CDL) introduced as a more encompassing and contemporary vision of career education.

Arguably, the focus of career education is largely on the critical transition out of school to work or further education. The next section explores the challenge of post-school transitions that young people experience.

The context of career education

Transitioning from full-time education to full-time work is increasingly challenging for young people. In 2017, 11 per cent of those who completed Year 12 in 2016 were not employed or enrolled in study (Education Council, 2019a). According to the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), 31 per cent of young people (aged 15 to 25) are unemployed or underemployed (FYA, 2018a), where underemployment includes working fewer hours than desired (LSAY, 2019). An increasing number of young people are more likely to be working in multiple jobs to reach full-time working hours (Education Council, 2019a). University graduates also experience underemployment, being forced to “make do” with jobs that are not consistent with their level of skill and qualification (O’Shea, 2019; QILT, 2019).

For those who do achieve full-time work, the process can be lengthy. It now takes young people an average of 2.6 years to transition from full-time education to full-time work (FYA, 2018a). For some, this transition to work can take up to five years (O’Connell et al., 2019). Even with a university degree, the transition to desirable employment in a preferred field of study can take up to four years (O’Shea, 2019).

Underemployment and lengthy transitions to full-time employment characterise the journeys that many youth experience in their move from school to work. More recently, these journeys have been made even more difficult by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in severe disruption to the world’s education systems (UNESCO, 2020). Tertiary education is likely to experience a 3.5 per cent decline in enrolment worldwide, resulting in 7.9 million students not completing their higher-education qualifications (UNESCO, 2020). The burden of COVID-19 will not fall evenly. Students with a disability, those experiencing financial disadvantage and those with poor internet and computer access are already more likely to withdraw from university; thus, these cohorts will be the ones dropping out of formal educational settings in higher proportions (Harvey, 2020, May 10). Furthermore, finding and keeping employment will be much harder for young people as a result of the economic downturn created by the pandemic (Borland, 2020, April 15). It’s likely that older workers will not be retiring, which will reduce employment availability (Borland, 2020, April 15). Finally, a disproportionate number of young people work casually in industries most affected by

COVID-19 restrictions, such as hospitality and retail, and the casual nature of their employment means that they are more likely to be laid off and last to be rehired (Borland, 2020, April 15).

At the same time as navigating the current employment environment, young people must also consider what the future of work will look like. The world of work is changing rapidly as a result of globalisation, artificial intelligence and technology (Education Council, 2019a; FYA, 2018a; OECD, 2016; Torii, 2018). Automation, global influences and more-flexible roles have dramatically changed the nature of work and how people progress through their careers (FYA, 2018a). The term "career" implies a sequence of work roles, both paid and unpaid, that continues over a lifetime (Fuller, McCrum & Macfadyen, 2014; Irving, 2013). However, careers are no longer linear and situated in one field of work; instead, today's careers are flexible and multiple (FYA, 2018a; LSAY, 2019; MCEECDYA, 2010; OECD, 2016). Indeed, the average 15-year-old is predicted to have 17 jobs over five different careers in their lifetime (FYA, 2018a).

The future of work will also require that young people engage and reengage with post-school education throughout their lives (Bolton, 2019; Education Council, 2020; O'Connell et al., 2019). Most of the jobs created in the next five years will require post-school qualifications (O'Connell et al., 2019), predominantly a bachelor degree or higher for professional occupations. To be competitive in the job markets of the future, students will need not only to complete Year 12, but also to obtain additional qualifications through post-school education or training (Education Council, 2019a, 2020). However, school-to-work pathways have changed dramatically, and traditional routes to work have been described as no longer relevant (FYA, 2018a; International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy, 2017; Raciti, 2019; Ranasinghe et al., 2019).

Clearly, career education is necessary to help young people navigate the new work reality, and to determine their own education and training pathways to find employment. The next section explores the importance of career education beyond workforce participation and productivity, with particular focus on human rights and equity.

The value of career education for equity

Career education that develops individuals' career-management competencies is vital for anyone who needs to manage the changes in the labour market outlined above (FYA, 2018b; MCEECDYA, 2010; Skillsroad, 2018). The Australian Government also highlights how important career education is for workforce participation and national productivity (Australian Government, 2013a). However, career education is also important for reasons of equity. It is internationally recognised that countries need to work proactively to ensure individuals reach their career goals, not only because of economic benefit but also for personal and ethical reasons:

> *Effective career guidance helps individuals to reach their potential, economies to become more efficient, and societies to become fairer* (OECD et al., 2019, p. 3).

In fact, quality career education should be recognised as a basic human right (CDAA, 2012). This fundamental nature of career education is recognised in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The 17 goals, adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, are "the world's best plan to build a better world for people and our planet by 2030" (UN, 2020). The eighth goal (SDG8) aims to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" (UN, 2020), a goal that can be maximised by responding to SDG4, "inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2020). Quality career education is a pathway to the achievement of both goals.

Quality career education shapes both society and the well-being of individuals within it, and helps all individuals reach their full potential (Yates & Bruce, 2017). Traditionally, shifts in demand for skills have disproportionately affected workers with lower levels of skills and education, and the rewards of the work reality that is approaching are unlikely to be bestowed evenly among the workforce (Torii, 2018). The International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy (ICCDPP) writes:

> *In this context, career education/learning is a social compensatory measure to enable people to participate effectively in society and the economy just as maths and language learning* (ICCDPP, 2019).

Thus, quality career education has the potential to lessen the gap in educational and employment outcomes between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Australian Government, 2013a; Bajada & Trayler, 2014). The Bridge Group (2017) claims that without tailored career education programs, equity measures for students from low SES backgrounds will not be met.

Quality career education may be even more important for young people living in areas with scarce post-school educational and employment opportunities (Cuervo, Chesters & Aberdeen, 2019; Napthine, Graham, Lee & Wills, 2019) such as those in some parts of RRR Australia. In Australia, there is a persistent relationship between location and educational outcomes (Cardak et al., 2017; Halsey, 2017; Lamb, Jackson, Walstab & Huo, 2015), and youth in remote areas face high levels of unemployment, which shape their post-school opportunities and aspirations (Youth Action, Uniting & Mission Australia, 2018). Further, for students who do wish to access higher education, recent research illustrated in the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy,* suggests that there is insufficient support, in terms of financial and transition assistance for students (Napthine et al., 2019). While the impact of location is complex and individual, being from a low SES background and living in an RRR location can have a cumulative impact on the disadvantage that students face (Napthine et al., 2019; Pollard, 2018). For students in this group, quality career education that is appropriately nuanced by place has been identified as being vital for achieving equity and vitalising RRR communities (Napthine et al., 2019).

Current approaches to career education

This section discusses career education in the school system, with a specific focus on secondary school provision, because this is the stage at which provision intensifies as education and career decisions need to be made.

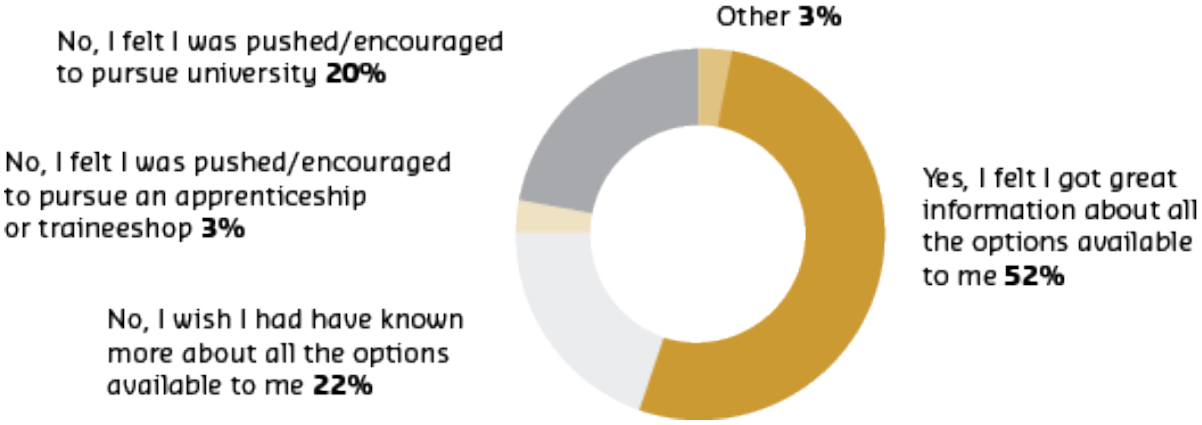
Career practitioners can be found in schools, further-education colleges, universities, adult education services and public employment services (OECD, 2004). The current and most prevalent approach to the provision of career education in schools is through the appointment of a career adviser or career counsellor. In NSW public schools, for example, career advisers are expected to “help students explore their education and career options [and] deliver education programs and activities for groups of students or individuals” (NSW Government, 2019b, n.p.). The function of the school career adviser is to assist young people in conceptualising their interests and skills whilst also providing information about what careers are available to them and pathways to those careers. This may be conducted in whole-class, small-group and individual settings (Morgan, 2016). It is expected that career advisers also develop career programs, organise work experience placements and host events such as open days and career expos (Aspden et al., 2015; J. Brown, Healy, McCredie & McIlveen, 2019; Calzaferri, 2011; Galvan & Negrete, 2017; Gore et al., 2015). Importantly, school career advisers should provide their students with access to employers and businesses that can offer valuable career advice and experience through work placements (McGrath & Murphy, 2016; Moynihan, 2015), school visits (Kashefpakdel, Rehill, & Hughes, 2018) and mentoring (McGrath & Murphy, 2016). The school career adviser role

is designed to help students, parents and carers understand how the curriculum, subject selection, Higher School Certificate (HSC), further education and training, and work experience affect career decisions (NSW Government, 2019b). Research has shown that career advisers can make a significant impact on students' choice of school subjects and careers (Aspden et al., 2015).

In addition, in NSW, a transitions adviser—generally a teacher trained to work with students who are disengaged from the school or learning environment—might work closely with a career adviser. Transition advisers are expected to personalise career experiences and resources to help students make a positive transition through and from school (NSW Government, 2019b).

Despite the clear articulation of these roles, current approaches to career education in countries such as Australia, New Zealand (NZ), the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) have attracted some criticism (S. Brown, 2015; Parliament of Victoria, 2018; Moote & Archer, 2018; Yates & Bruce, 2017). One criticism is that career education in schools is poorly understood and under-appreciated by stakeholders (Parliament of Victoria, 2018; Furbish & Reid, 2013; Yates & Bruce, 2017). There are also concerns about quality, equitable provision, resourcing, staff qualifications and training and ineffectual policy. These are explored below.

First, concerns about the quality of career education in schools include views that it is outdated and does not adequately prepare students for life after school (Parliament of Victoria, 2018). In NZ, Yates and Bruce (2017, p. 64) found that the "career education framework for many schools is not fit for purpose in today's world and is based on assumptions about the world of work that no longer exist, such as a stable labour market". In an Australian study, only about half of the more than 30,000 15- to 24-year-olds surveyed felt that they had received good quality career information during their schooling (Skillsroad, 2018). Specifically, significant proportions of young people felt that they had been pushed or encouraged to pursue university (20 per cent), and wished that they had received more information about all of the options available to them (22 per cent) (Figure 3) (Skillsroad, 2018).



Response to the question: **Throughout your schooling, how would you rate the quality of career conversations you receive (or received)?**

Source: Skillsroad, 2018, p32.

Figure 3. Quality of school career conversations

The provision of limited information and options to students and the "funnelling" of students into specific pathways is an issue that needs closer investigation. However, there is evidence that it can be partly the result of a career adviser's work or education experiences as well as their personal values. Where career advisers lack relevant qualifications or have

had little professional development (PD), they rely on their life experience to carry out the role (Yates & Bruce, 2017). Indeed, in Australia, employers perceive that some school career advisers have a superficial understanding of their industries (Parliament of Victoria, 2018). Also, the socioeconomic status or regionality of the school a student is attending can inform how direction is offered—for example, university versus trades or work (Fuller et al., 2014)—with particular routes being promoted as more valuable than others (Parliament of Victoria, 2018; Fuller et al., 2014). This can result in limitations to the information and options offered to students.

Second, career education is inequitably delivered across schools and groups of students. The time students spend on career education varies significantly between schools, with 10 per cent of Victorian government secondary schools spending 45 minutes or less on career education per student per year and 10 per cent spending 12 hours or more per student per year (Parliament of Victoria, 2018), a difference likely to have profound significance for students' career outcomes. There is also evidence that in Australia and the UK, career education is shaped according to socioeconomic class, with those from low SES backgrounds having less access to support and resources (Andrews & Hooley, 2017; Atalier Learning Solutions, 2012). UK research suggests that poor provision of career advice may promote inequalities based on social class, ethnicity and gender (Moote & Archer, 2018). It is suggested that in many Australian contexts the students most in need of career support are the ones with the least access (Galliott & Graham, 2015).

Delivery of career programs is linked to the availability of resources, which is frequently cited as a problem for the provision of career education in schools in Australia as well as those in England (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017; CDAA, 2012; CICA, 2015; Hooley & Dodd, 2015; Moote & Archer, 2018; Youth Action, 2017). In some schools, the central resource in the traditional provision of career education, the career adviser, is only available for a short time each week (CICA, 2017a) and is often a part-time staff member with additional classroom teaching responsibilities (CICA, 2017a). In NZ too, career staff are often part-time and struggle to find enough time for the role (Yates & Bruce, 2017). In NSW schools, individual schools and principals manage the majority of their budget and can decide to use their funds to meet the specific needs of their school, including the allocation of the teaching load of those staff employed as career advisers (Youth Action, 2017). This has the potential for large inconsistencies to occur across schools. The Joyce Review (Joyce, 2019) identified that insufficient funding, combined with a lack of training for careers advisers, can cause significant disadvantage for students.

Indeed, an identified weakness in the provision of career education is the absence of universal formal career-specific qualifications and specific, clear job descriptions for career advisers. This situation is repeated in both New Zealand (NZ) and the UK (Career Development Institute, 2015; Furbish & Reid, 2013). Specifically, Furbish and Reid (2013) found that in NZ, while those advisers without qualifications could put together a best practice program, the absence of formal qualifications potentially limited the refinement of their practice based on theory and research to which they had not been exposed. In Australia, career adviser skill and qualification requirements vary between states and education systems. The NSW Department of Education and Training do not have a definitive position description for career advisers, only an optional framework for performance that is enforced only at individual schools' discretion (Youth Action, 2017). In Catholic and Independent schools, there are no guidelines or policies for career guidance at all, with individual schools making decisions about whether to employ someone as a career adviser and what standards to uphold (Youth Action, 2017). As a result, school career advisers may not have the requisite skills and knowledge to fully support students in their career planning and decision-making. In Australia specifically, the staffing of RRR schools faces challenges related to high staff turnover, younger inexperienced staff, inexperienced leadership and

teachers working outside their area of expertise (Downes & Roberts, 2018), which may also compromise the quality of career education staff and programs for low SES students.

Third, the **policy framework** for career education in Australian schools is fragmented and ineffectual (Australian Government, 2013a, 2019; Parliament of Victoria, 2018), with neither the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (MCEECDYA, 2010) nor professional standards and benchmarking resources (CICA, 2014) being compulsory. An absence of national, regulated career development policy and practice has also been highlighted in the UK (Andrews & Hooley, 2017). Without "universal benchmarks" (Christie, 2016, p. 73), career services may not be implementing best practice principles in their work. Andrews and Hooley (2017) suggest that a lack of regulation of the quality of career work in UK schools and nationally agreed standards for career leadership may result in unequal outcomes for young people (Andrews & Hooley, 2017).

However, in recent years, there has been an investment in the Australian context to addressing the provision of equitable and accurate career advice to Australians. The National Careers Institute (NCI) was introduced by the Federal Government in 2019, to ensure that "…people have access to authoritative, accurate career information and support irrespective of their age or career stage" (National Careers Institute, 2021). In addition to providing clear and simple careers information through an online presence, the NCI also provides career guidance and counselling sessions with a qualified Career Practitioner, information for school leavers, their parents and guardians and works collaboratively with states and territories to improve career information. The NCI has also recently introduced partnership grants programs to encourage organisations to work together to improve career outcomes and create education and training pathways aligned to the needs of employers. The NCI provides a unique opportunity to further address the challenges of career provision in Australia, particularly improving career provision to students in schools through the professionalisation of career advisers and working alongside schools to implement new and innovative approaches to career advice that enables a more equitable provision.

The following section examines more closely the implications for variable career education on a specific group of students: those from low SES backgrounds.

Considering students from low SES backgrounds

In Australia, six groups of students are officially recognised as having inequitable academic and employment outcomes in comparison to the broader population: students from low SES backgrounds, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, women in non-traditional areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students living in regional, rural or remote areas, and students with a disability (Department of Education, 2018). Officially, the SES of Australian students is categorised as high, medium or low and reflects the educational and occupational level of communities (ABS, 2018). The top 25 per cent of the population aged 15–64 are classified as high SES based on where they live; the middle 50 per cent are classified as medium SES; and the bottom 25 per cent as low SES (QILT, 2019). Students are classified as being from a low SES background based on the statistical area (SA1) of their permanent home residence (Department of Education, 2018).

Students from low SES backgrounds are highly intersected, which means that many students in one category may fit one or more of the others, or have additional characteristics that lead to disadvantage, such as having travelled to Australia as a result of conflict within their home country. These factors have a "compounding effect" on disadvantage (McLachlan et al., 2013, p. 93). Consequently, rates of participation in the workforce, overall employment and full-time employment for people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly lower than for the rest of the population (Cunningham et al., 2014). Accordingly, unemployment rates are also higher (Cunningham et al., 2014).

Young people from low SES backgrounds may also experience disadvantage in school, compared to their higher SES peers (McLachlan et al., 2013). Within Australia, students from low SES backgrounds have a higher probability of leaving school early (McLachlan et al., 2013). Specifically, only 73 per cent of students from low SES backgrounds complete Year 12, compared to 83 per cent of students from high SES backgrounds (Education Council, 2019a). The educational participation rates of students from low SES backgrounds in further education is also lower than that of students from other SES background groups (Figure 4) (Brett, 2018; Cunninghame, 2017; Li & Carroll, 2017; Ranasinghe et al., 2019). In compulsory school education, equity groups make up a substantial proportion of students, but their proportion declines significantly in non-compulsory, post-school education. Specifically, students from low SES backgrounds comprise 25 per cent of school students, but make up only 18 per cent and 17 per cent of VET and higher-education students, respectively. Individuals from low SES backgrounds in Australia are 20 per cent less likely to follow a pathway into higher education and subsequent work compared to those from high SES backgrounds (Ranasinghe et al., 2019), but are 12 per cent more likely to enter full-time work early through apprenticeships or traineeships compared to those from more financially advantaged backgrounds (Ranasinghe et al., 2019).

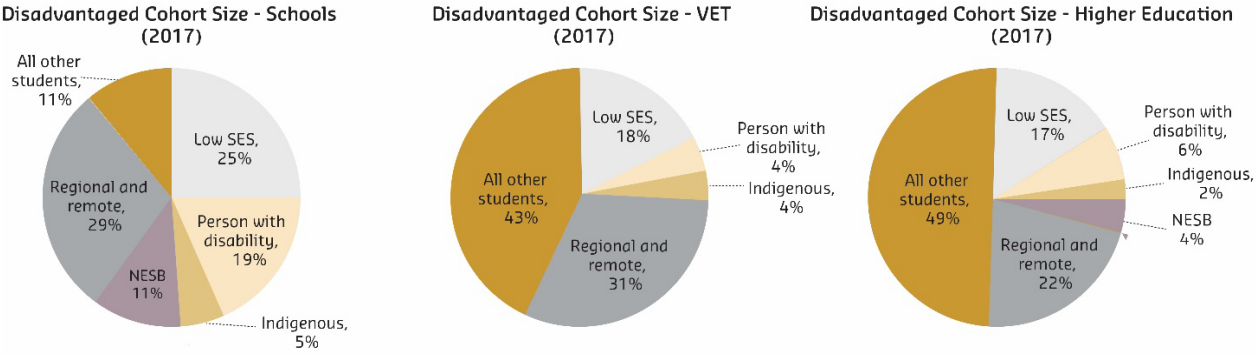


Figure 4. Size of disadvantaged cohort by education sector

Source: (Education Council, 2019, p. 29)

The educational disadvantage that students from low SES backgrounds experience is also noted in the higher education sector (Li & Carroll, 2017), with students from low SES backgrounds having higher rates of attrition (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017; Productivity Commission, 2019) and experiencing unequal employment outcomes from their university experience (QILT, 2019).

However, evidence indicates that many students from low SES backgrounds thrive when they have the support from teachers, career advisers and mentors (Bridge Group, 2017; Cuervo et al., 2019; Harwood, McMahon, O'Shea, Bodkin-Andrews, & Priestley, 2015) and when universities encourage widening participation and provide transition programs (Zacharias, 2017). O'Shea and Delahunty (2019) advocate for a move away from a deficit view of students from low SES backgrounds, and a harnessing of this cohort's strengths, skills and knowledge to support career success. This strengths-based view is drawn from sociological theorisation, the details of which are explored in the following section.

Conclusion

Many different terms and combinations of terms are used to describe career-related activities; this reveals the inconsistency, conflict and overlap in career policy and practice. This report has adopted the term "career education" to refer to current career-related activity in schools. Arguably, career education in schools is focused on young people's critical transition out of school to work or further education. Currently, this transition is highly challenging, characterised by lengthy transitions and unemployment or underemployment.

Within this subdued employment market, young people must also consider the future, including how to manage the new work reality, multiple careers and engagement and re-engagement with post-school education. Career education is necessary to help young people navigate this environment and to achieve social mobility. However, the traditional "career adviser" model of career education is inadequate, and there is evidence that it promotes, rather than alleviates, inequalities. An approach that values students' individual strengths, skills and knowledge promises a way to better support career success.

The following section discusses the theoretical framework for this project.

Theoretical framework

Bourdieu's social reproduction

Bourdieu's (1986) perspectives on social reproduction have been chosen as the theoretical framework to underpin this study. Social reproduction sits at the cornerstone of sociological theory (Abrutyn, 2016) and explores whether individuals are in control of their own actions and destinies, or buffeted by larger social and economic structures (Abrutyn, 2016). Bourdieu's work centres on the capacity of structures and institutions to reproduce themselves. Therefore, systems such as education can be regarded as structures that may maintain students' social classes (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu largely positions "structures" as determining social circumstances, with no consideration given to individuals as agents of their own destinies. However, Mills (2008) has argued that social reproduction also has the capacity to be transformative, rather than purely reproductive. This transformation relies on students being taught "how to do the play" (Bok, 2010), the term "play" referring to successfully accessing education. Individuals who know "how to do the play" enact agency to transcend their social conditions. Through this lens, institutions and structures can influence individual circumstances.

Bourdieu's methodological tools

Bourdieu's theoretical constructs underpinning his ideas on social reproduction were intended as a methodological toolkit to explore social phenomena (Grenfell, 2014). Bourdieu's tools of field, habitus and social capital can provide a lens through which to gain a rich understanding of the structures within society that can be enablers or disenablers in how students imagine and achieve their career goals.

Bourdieu's ideas of social reproduction and tools of field, habitus and social capital will be used as a theoretical framework in this study to understand how career education can operate to open up and support individuals' aspirations, and to identify the key structural barriers that prevent students from fully realising their career goals. Bourdieu's (1979) concept of field describes the setting in which agents and their social positions are located. The concept of field occupies social domains, rather than physical spaces; therefore, field is defined by the individuals who exist within those social domains and takes the form of "networks of social relations, structured systems of social positions" (Everett, 2002, p. 60). The concept of field acknowledges that in different areas of society, whether it is family, education, law, politics or cultural settings, differing hierarchies, statuses, ranks, expectations and rules exist. Furthermore, Van Krieken (2000) identified that these hierarchies, statuses, ranks, expectations and rules are often "hidden", and are therefore imposed upon the agents. Thus, the position of the agent in the field is a direct result of the specific rules and social constructs of society.

Habitus relates to the set of culturally learned dispositions, skills and ways of knowing that explain how social and cultural messages shape an individual's thoughts and actions, and how that individual will operate in the field or in society (Bourdieu, 1979). This results in deeply engrained behaviours that emerge as a result of life experiences and extend to include habits, skills or even preferences for certain cultural objects. Robbins (1993) identifies that individual habitus occurs through socialisation early in life, via interactions with object structures such as family. Through an individual's habitus, there is an expectation that social structures are regenerated as the individual continues to operate within the same behaviours as those around them. Bourdieu also argues that members of a field generally share common beliefs and values (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The shared belief or accepted norm is known as doxa. Doxa is internalised, and can also evolve as individuals traverse between fields, negotiating their doxic practices within each field.

A person's economic, cultural and social capital is linked to their habitus (embedded dispositions) and their field (social position within an area of society). Economic capital may be generated through inherited wealth, family income or engagement in the economy for financial return (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is the accumulation of knowledge, skills and behaviours through socialisation and education (Bourdieu, 1979). The acquiring of cultural capital is strongly attributed to a person's race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, religion and age. Finally, social capital refers to the networks, knowledge and resources to which individuals have access. These networks significantly contribute to the bank of knowledge that individuals acquire around communication, culture and power in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The various forms of capital are interlinked, and social mobility cannot be achieved merely through increasing one form of capital (Hart, 2019). Instead, an individual's differential ability to convert one form of capital into other forms enables social mobility.

Application of Bourdieu's work in this project

Bourdieu's methodological tool of field was applied to this study by exploring the different fields that students, parents, teachers and other key stakeholders such as universities or industry occupy in career education. Field provides a lens to deeply explore how the different contexts that each of these stakeholder groups occupy in this study influence their understanding of how career education is provided to students. This study brought together individuals that belong to different fields, such as family, education and industry. The blurring of these fields (Kaiserfeld, 2013; Powell & Solga, 2010) or bridges between fields (Colley, Chadderton, & Nixon, 2014) will allow for the construction of new rules, dispositions and languages in relation to career education and enable new ways of working to emerge in the provision of career education to students.

Habitus will be drawn upon to understand the values, dispositions and practices that the diverse key influencer groups brought to this study, and to enable or disable the provision of effective career education. Previous research has identified that the internal habitus of universities, schools and families (Archer, Hollingsworth, & Halsall, 2007; Archer & Yamishita, 2003; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005; Sellar & Gale, 2011; Thomas, 2002) can shape individuals' behaviours and attitudes about their post-school destinations. Specifically, this study will use habitus to explore how key influencers perceive the intent of career education from their individual context, as well as how this influences who has responsibility over the provision of career education and the role of other key influencer groups.

Finally, social and cultural capital will be used as a methodological tool to understand how socio-cultural barriers can both inhibit a student from imagining or achieving their long-term career goals and serve as an asset that could be acquired through effective career education. The transmission or development of social capital has been demonstrated to occur through working collaboratively with students to provide access to networks, concrete experiences and resources that can enable them to achieve their imagined futures (Bok, 2010; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Reay et al., 2005; Sellar & Gale, 2011). This study thus deeply explores the perspectives of students and key influencer groups in understanding the inhibitors or barriers that have prevented students from achieving their career goals, as well as identifying the people, resources or structures that have enabled or influenced them to achieve their desired career trajectory. These understandings have formed the development of a suite of recommendations about how effective career education can enable students from low SES backgrounds to achieve their career goals.

Methodology

Introduction

This mixed methods research engaged a total of 564 participants including primary, secondary school and university students; parents and carers of young people; teachers; career advisers; and practitioners engaged in Australian career education. This section details the various data collection methods and analysis processes undertaken in each stage of the project.

The project unfolded over four stages, each of which was designed to contribute specific learnings to the overall project. Each stage also existed on a continuum that was overlapping and iterative, with each of the stages informing the next.

Stage 1 research activity

Stage 1 of the project consisted of a Literature Review and Desktop Audit. These two activities were critical in establishing the context and research base for the project as well as providing a substantial basis for the development of the BPPs. The methods by which these activities were conducted are detailed in the full documents. A brief overview of these methods is presented here.

Literature review

A systematic literature review was undertaken to determine the factors that influenced the career education of students from low SES backgrounds. The literature review was conducted using a scoping methodology (Arksey, 2005; Gore et al., 2017), which allowed for a wider understanding of the topic.

The scoping literature review was conducted in stages, with the first stage calling for literature references from known experts in the field of career education. This yielded key references and websites, which were built upon and expanded through the use of key words and author searches. The second stage of the literature search involved database searches through the University of Wollongong's library search engine and global databases. The third stage involved searching through the website of CERIC, a Canadian non-profit organisation that supports education and research in career development. CERIC had pre-existing lists of literature specific to search words and topics that had been compiled by CERIC staff to support research.

Desktop audit

The specific objective of this desktop audit was to examine features of prominent career education programs to better understand the practices that might support students from low SES backgrounds in achieving equitable outcomes from education and work.

Drawing on online sources, the desktop search located current career programs for students in primary and secondary schools. This search included widening-participation (WP) programs carried out in schools by universities; private companies offering career support for students; non-for-profit companies offering career programs for students; and schools with well-developed practice. Additional programs were found and investigated based on information given by key stakeholders in the project.

A limitation of this desktop audit was the difficulty of finding career-education programs solely through an online search. It was assumed that there were a larger number of schools, universities and private and non-profit providers that provide career-education opportunities to students that were not visible on the internet. It was also possible that there was a shortage of innovative practices for providing career education to students.

An early version of the literature review and desktop audit was presented to equity practitioners and researchers at the Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA) Enabling Excellence through Equity Conference (November 2019). Attendees contributed ideas, experiences, exemplars of best practice and further references, which were incorporated. A more developed draft of the literature review and desktop audit was sent to the wider project team (n=6) and the expert panel for the project (n=11) for their input and insights, which were also incorporated into the final documents.

As highlighted, the literature review and desktop audit informed and overlapped with Stage 2 data collection, as outlined below.

Stage 2 research activity

Stage 2 data collection

The data collection in Stage 2 involved qualitative surveys and interviews/focus groups with three groups of participants: current university students from low SES backgrounds, parents, and key stakeholders. The key stakeholders included career advisers, school leaders, equity practitioners, career service providers and members of industry bodies. This was a purposeful component of the research design, as informed by the theoretical framework, to bring together diverse perspectives of key stakeholder groups to challenge the concepts of traditional models of career education, based on their own dispositions, values and experiences. Approval to undertake the research was received from the appropriate university Human Research Ethics Committees (HREC) (see Appendix 1 for notice of approval). All participants were recruited via electronic media including contact list emails and advertisements in newsletters.

Table 2 describes the participants and the recruitment approach used to target them.

Table 2. Details of recruitment

PARTICIPANT TYPE	METHODS OF RECRUITMENT
University students	Email invitation sent to students who had participated in widening participation activities
Parents	Advertisement in university newsletters to parents and on social media platforms
Stakeholders	Email invitation from investigator/practitioner contact lists

Student and parent participants were offered the choice between participating in a focus group/interview (approximately 45–60 minutes) or completing a survey (approximately 30 minutes) made available via a link to the Qualtrics survey.

Many participants, particularly parents, elected to complete the survey, which, given time and health-related constraints, is not surprising. Offering surveys enabled a range of participants to be included, as shown in the demographic tables in Appendices 2, 3 and 4. Two surveys were used, each aimed at a different audience (students and parents), with variations in the questions depending on the target audience. Copies of the surveys can be found in Appendices 5 and 6.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted either face-to-face or via phone depending on a variety of factors, including timing and geography. While the overarching theme and purpose of the questions were similar, they varied according to participant type. Details of the interview questions for students, parents and stakeholders are available in Appendices 7, 8 and 9, respectively.

An additional data collection method, visual mapping, was used with students during face-to-face data collection. At the start of each focus group, each student was provided with paper and a pen, asked to map their educational and career journeys and then, after a few

minutes, asked to “talk through” their map with the group or interviewer. The prompts for this part of the data collection are included in the interview questions for students in Appendix 7.

Table 3 shows the number of participants who engaged in the various data-collection modes used in Stage 2 of this study.

Table 3. Stage 2 participants and mode of engagement

PARTICIPANT TYPE	SURVEY	INDIVIDUAL PHONE INTERVIEW	FACE-TO-FACE FOCUS GROUP
University students	45	4	23
Parents	38	3	n/a
Stakeholders	n/a	16	n/a

The data collection phase of Stage 2 was specifically designed to maximise participant engagement with the project. Career advisers, school leaders, equity practitioners, career service providers and members of industry bodies readily accepted an invitation to participate in a research interview. For parents/caregivers and young people, a survey option was offered that would allow participation that was both convenient and safe, from a COVID-19 health perspective. Indeed, the methodology allowed for the participation of a diverse group of people. Table 4 provides an overview of the equity markers with which participants self-identified.

Table 4. Stage 2 parent and student participant demographics

PARTICIPANT TYPE	Low SES	FiF	RRR	Disability	ATSI	Refugee	NESB
University students	21	30	44	8	5	3	10
Parents	12	n/a	4	3	2	0	3

The next section details the data analysis and organisation of all the data collected in this stage.

Stage 2 data analysis

This section briefly explains how each data set was handled in the analysis phase of Stage 2 of the project.

The survey data was collected via anonymous online questionnaires, exported out of the survey program (Qualtrics) and into an NVivo 12 project set up for this research.

All audio-recorded focus group/interview data was transcribed, and the transcripts were sent out for member checking. Once approved, the transcripts were de-identified, with names of people, locations and institutions replaced with pseudonyms, and imported into the NVivo 12 project.

The raw data was independently coded by three of the researchers. This was an inductive process that commenced with line-by-line coding. All four members of the team then reviewed and interrogated the emerging codes, each independently writing up reflective commentary and notes based on this initial coding. The team then met to discuss all the themes and each of the reflections collectively. At this meeting, the perspectives of all team members were collectively combined, with notes and insights from this meeting distributed to the team afterwards. These notes provided the basis for the next level of coding, and the themes that emerged were sent to all team members for review. This version of the data underwent a final analysis, which resulted in a set of five themes, each deeply embedded in the data but conceptually dense. These themes are presented in the following chapter, and

additional publications are planned to delve deeper into those findings and provide further insight.

In addition, visual maps were interrogated in order to shed light on how students saw their educational and career journeys. Specifically, the maps were examined for similarities and differences in their structure and content with attention paid to colour, size, text, image, and line as well as the journey that was being described.

The insights gathered from Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the research informed the development of a draft set of BPPs that were then applied to Stage 3 of the research. An overview of Stage 3 is presented below.

Stage 3 research activity

Stage 3 data collection

The purpose of Stage 3 of the research was to trial a set of draft BPPs developed through earlier project activities by designing, implementing and evaluating programs informed by the Principles. Five career education programs were planned and developed; however, due to COVID-19, only four could go ahead within the timeframe of the project. While the program implementation and evaluation of the fifth program did not occur in time to be included in this report, stakeholders involved in developing the program were interviewed on the quality and usefulness of the BPPs and the process of applying them to a career education program. Those findings informed both the recommendations and the BPPs.

Detailed case studies of each of the four programs, including their methods and findings, are available online <<document will be available online>>. Table 5 provides a brief overview of the programs, the research methods undertaken to evaluate each program, numbers of participants engaged with each method and adjustments that were made to the program as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

Table 5. Stage 3 programs and research methods

Program Number	Program Name	Participants	Delivery	Research Methods	COVID-19 Adjustments
1	Beyond the role of career adviser: A teacher professional-development program	High-school teachers at one school in a low SES area	Three one-hour, face-to-face professional development sessions, collaboratively facilitated by the high school career adviser, and university staff members focused on enhancing the capacity of all teachers to provide career support	Pre- and post-program survey with teachers (n=19) Post-program interviews with teachers (n=5) and program designers/implementers (n=4)	Implemented face-to-face with physical distancing and hygiene precautions in place
2	Industries of the future: A university preparation intervention for non-school-leavers	University enabling-program students	A session with information about "industries of the future" were embedded in units of study in two university preparation courses with the aim of building knowledge and aspirations of careers of the future and pathways into those	Pre- and post-program survey with students (n=113) Post-program interviews with program designers/implementers (n=5)	Implemented via remote delivery (Zoom)
3	Careers breakfasts: A career-information program for parents of high school students	Parents and carers of high school students	A 1.5- to two-hour remotely delivered information session presented to three groups of parents with the aim of increasing parent knowledge about pathways and education and training opportunities	Post-program survey of parent participants (n=63) Parent collaborator reflection (n=1) Interviews with parent participants (n=12)	Implemented via remote delivery (Zoom)
4	Find your future focus: A place-based career-education program for high school students	High school students	Two or three one-hour face-to-face lessons with Years 7 and 8 students from regional/rural schools, with the aim of developing student knowledge of local careers and pathways	Pre- and post-program surveys with students (n=91) Program evaluation data	Program delayed, then implemented face-to-face with physical distancing and hygiene precautions in place
5	Explore your future: A career exploration and mentoring program for primary school students	Primary school students in one low SES school and university student mentors	Due to COVID-19 and limitations on excursions and external visitors to schools, the delivery of this program was delayed. At the time of publication, the program intended to host primary students from one school on one university campus with the aim of broadening aspirations	Interviews with program designers (n=2)	Program delayed until after the publication of this report (during 2021). The case study document will be available online after program evaluation occurs

As the table shows, 287 program participants and 21 design and implementation staff were engaged in the process of evaluating the five programs, which were informed by the BPPs.

Mixed methods were used to capture data in Stage 3. Four institutions used pre- and/or post-program surveys containing quantitative and qualitative questions, and all institutions

used semi-structured, qualitative interviews to evaluate their programs. The following section describes how this data was organised and analysed.

Stage 3 data analysis

A more detailed description of the methods of data collection and analysis for each program in Stage 3 is available in each of the Case Studies <<documents will be available online>>. Table 6 provides an overview of how data were analysed during Stage 3.

Table 6. Stage 3 data-analysis processes

Data Source	Data Form	Processing Activity	Analytical Activity
Survey data	Excel files	Cleaned, uploaded to NVivo project	Basic statistical analysis — tallying and calculating percentages Line-by-line coding of open-ended questions
Interview/focus-group data	Audio files	Transcribed, member checked, de-identified, uploaded to NVivo project	Line-by-line coding

Throughout the entire project, reflection and consultation across the project team was ongoing. This process culminated in the final stage of the project, during which the findings, recommendations and BPPs were finalised. This stage, which started early in the project, is described next.

Stage 4 and underpinning research activity

Stage 4 of the project involved drawing together the findings from each of the previous stages to create a set of recommendations and further refine the BPPs for the education sector.

Collaboration and consultation were critical elements of the project, which added to the rigour of the research and ensuing recommendations. Consultation commenced early in the project, overlapped with Stage 1, and continued through Stages 2 and 3. From the start, the research team reflected on and discussed their findings. At various points, the team also sent out documents for both formal and informal feedback and review to various stakeholders and experts. Table 7 identifies the key points of external consultation in the project.

Table 7. Consultation activity throughout the project

Date	Activity	Group	Details
Nov 19	Conference presentation and workshop	Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA) conference attendees	Feedback on principles of best practice uncovered in the Stage 1 literature review
Feb 20	Roundtable discussion	Woolyungah Indigenous Centre, University of Wollongong	Consultation about Indigenous perspectives on career education
Feb 20	Workshop	School career advisers; higher education equity and outreach practitioners	Discussion and review of BPPs. Application of BPPs to pilot programs.
Dec 19 and Sept 20	Email correspondence Zoom meeting	Project expert committee	Review of literature review and desktop audit documents. Review and discussion of BPPs.
Aug-Sept 20	Formal interviews and email correspondence	School teachers and higher education practitioners	Feedback on BPPs

As the table shows, consultation occurred frequently and deeply throughout the project. Collaboration was also facilitated in this project in many different ways across sectors, universities and stakeholders, incorporating as many perspectives as possible. Of particular note were partnerships with career advisers, teachers and parents to design and implement of the research. In addition to the 564 research participants, more than 50 people made direct contributions to this project.

Conclusion

This section has highlighted the stages of data collection and analysis. As the chapter demonstrates, the findings at each stage were informed by the previous stage and incorporated into the next, deeply embedding collaboration and consultation throughout. The next chapter presents the findings from across the entire project.

Findings

As outlined in the previous section, the project employed a mixed methods approach to understand best practice career education for students from low SES backgrounds from a range of perspectives. First, a comprehensive international literature review and desktop audit of practice were undertaken to understand what was already known and what programs existed. Then, qualitative data was obtained via interviews and surveys with parents, students and stakeholders in career education. A range of career education programs were designed and implemented according to BPPs and evaluated empirically. These findings were analysed through the theoretical lens of Bourdieu's methodological tools to deeply examine the role of social context and the diverse dispositions, values and perspectives that a range of stakeholders bring in challenging traditional views of career advice and career education. Embedded in this methodology was broad consultation, collaboration and deep reflection. As a result of this methodology, the project has obtained rich findings that present a comprehensive picture of current career provision for students from diverse backgrounds, and inform recommendations for future practice.

This section presents the key findings from the research, divided into five themes:

1. Effective career education: A game of chance
2. Key influencers of career education: Ownership and blame
3. Careers partnership work: Strengths and challenges of two models
4. Pathways and transitions: The need to support choice and flexibility
5. The unique experience of students from low SES backgrounds in RRR areas.

Once the findings have been presented separately, they will be drawn together in a discussion of key issues and themes in the following section.

Supporting data in the form of quotations is presented within this section. Table 8 explains how details about each participant are communicated in this section.

Table 8. Presentation of participant demographic information

Participant	Demographic Information Format	Example
Student interviewee	Pseudonym, age, degree	Liam, 17, B. Engineering
Student survey respondent	Student, gender, age range, degree, survey ID number	Student, M, 21-25 yrs., B. Communications, #32
Parent interviewee	Pseudonym, parent of [child age]	Naomi, parent of 10yo
Parent survey respondent	Parent, gender, survey ID number	Parent, F, #19
Stakeholder interviewee	Pseudonym, job title	Nicola, career adviser, rural low SES high school

Theme 1. Effective career education: A game of chance

Currently, career provision in schools is primarily centred around the work of a career adviser who plans and implements career-focused activities such as individual consultations and work experience. The research revealed some benefits as well as challenges for this model of career education. The key issues will be explored under the headings:

- The critical role of connecting with students
- Mismatch between the approach to career education and student expectations of career services
- Time and resources
- Quality school-based career education dependent on opportunity rather than strategy.

The critical role of connecting with students

In this study, both stakeholders and students stressed the importance of having personalised and individual career support. Nicola (career adviser, rural low SES high school) explained how having "one-on-one interviews where I can narrow down exactly what they're thinking of" allowed her to "source more information that's relevant to what they want to do rather than set them off on one of the websites to explore". Equally, Cheryl (career adviser, outer regional low SES high school) highlighted how the one-to-one interview was the most appropriate environment to provide effective guidance, as "they feel special because it's a one-on-one thing — I take the time to spend a whole period with them on their own and there's no interference from other people interacting". For students, the focus on the personal was key, so that any interactions were not only timely but also characterised by a broad knowledge span. Many of the students in this study described the career advice that had been available to them as "limited" and "narrow-minded", with one student describing the feeling that teachers had only limited personal experience to draw on in regard to careers: "some staff at school … did not know anything outside of their personal role, not even being able to draw on experiences of friends" (student, M, 21-25 yrs., B. Communications, #32).

The personal qualities of the career adviser were also key to these interactions. Students spoke positively of advisers who were available, helpful and accommodating, and reflected negatively on those who were not perceived in this way. "The school did have a career counsellor. However, I remember them being very unhelpful and regularly unavailable" (student, F, 21-25 yrs., B. Law, #31). Students also appreciated subject teachers who were positive and supportive. Some students reported negativity surrounding the career-related conversations that they had with their subject teachers. For example, "It was difficult to get much information from the teachers and they were quick to tell you how hard uni was if you wanted to do something medical or how useless some degrees were" (student, F, 21–25 yrs., B. Secondary Education/B. Science, #36).

Sustaining a personal connection seemed key in these relationships, and this characteristic would influence the extent that students would seek help. Two of the students reflected on needing an adviser whom they "clicked with"; that is, someone who was personable and worked to develop rapport and connection with students. "I was unlikely to ask the careers officer at school, as I did not think much of her. This doesn't mean she was not good, but she simply did not click with me" (student, M, 18–20 yrs., B. Science/B. Engineering, #1). Other students referred to how the relationship that the career adviser had with students influenced the adviser's ability to effectively do their job. One student stated that "due to the distanced relationship [the career adviser] maintained with my cohort throughout year 12, [it made] me feel as if they didn't have any idea as to how to guide students to make informed decisions" (student, F, 18–20 yrs., B. Applied Science, #39).

These findings highlight the need for the career service to emphasise the importance of personal relationships with students, perhaps by offering an approach that allows multiple staff to engage with students on the topic of careers. Relationship-building is key, and often this work is invisible in this role; thus, the interpersonal nature of this position needs to be made explicit and recognised for the time commitment it requires. Jennifer, University Student Equity Project Officer, has seen the difference a career adviser who knows the students and has built relationships with them can make:

> *… it wasn't just about handing out those manuals and doing those structured, really dry sessions, but it was more about learning what motivates the student as an individual and kind of walking alongside them in that journey.* (Jennifer, University Student Equity Project Officer)

Clearly, knowing and connecting with students is critical in the work of a career adviser, and has implications for their effectiveness and the outcomes for students.

Mismatch between approach to career education and student expectations of career services

The data also pointed to a mismatch between what students from low SES backgrounds *expected* from their career adviser and school-based career education and the *approach* adopted by career advisers in those contexts. The students' reflections showed an explicit expectation that students would be largely self-directed and independent in their career education, with one student describing it as "a 'look it up yourself' deal" (student, F, 18–20 yrs., B. Pharmacy, #19).

However, the individual learners may not welcome these expectations, with some of the students (n=31) and parents (n= 16) reporting that they felt unsupported and left to figure out how to achieve their (or their children's) employment goals themselves. More than one student felt that they had had to do everything by themselves: "It was more like me doing it and then asking my career adviser, 'Is this the thing I have to do?'" (Liam, 17, B. Engineering). As a result of this mismatch, "there were many students that were dissatisfied" (student, F, 18–20 yrs., B. Pharmacy) or unable to independently navigate their career pathway.

Students, who may have experienced being "spoon-fed" information in the classroom, seemed to feel that the "independent learner" approach that was being used in their school's provision of career advice was unhelpful for them. If a self-directed approach to career advice is expected from students, then perhaps this needs to be made more explicit, with clear instruction about these skills, and at an early stage, so that by the time they are making critical education and career decisions, individuals can effectively interact with career support services and achieve optimum outcomes.

Time and resources

An issue for career education in schools in low SES areas is insufficient resourcing, which can result in students "being left out" and "falling through the cracks". Stakeholders in career education claim that the resources allocated to career work in schools are insufficient, resulting in inconsistent provision across schools. Stakeholders have highlighted time as a fundamental resource in providing career education. Specifically, time constraints mean that career advisers must choose what to focus on; inevitably, some areas of provision or some groups of students miss out. In schools where a career adviser is not allocated enough time, students are denied much-needed contact or engagement with a career adviser. Lucy, CEO of a work placement provider, described the situation of career advisers in small rural schools, where they might only be allocated two periods a week to undertake their work:

> *They [name] don't get to spend any time at all with the students…. They get exactly the same mail, exactly the same emails as a full-time career adviser in a high school, they've got the same sorts of jobs to do, albeit with a smaller cohort, but they still have all of the career adviser roles to take on. But they just don't have the time to devote to it.* (Lucy, work placement provider CEO)

A lack of time might mean that a career adviser has to make difficult and limiting decisions. One such constraint, as Lucy (work placement provider CEO) identified, might be not being able to have individual consultations with students or not being able to deliver career-focused lessons. Another might be the need to focus primarily on senior students, with younger students receiving no, or limited, career education. William, a career adviser in a large regional high school of over 1,200 students, only has time to work with students initially to "generate ideas", leaving them to continue their journeys independently.

Similarly, the availability of work experience opportunities is affected by resourcing and career adviser time. The time-consuming nature of organising work placements means that students in some schools have limited, or no, access to them. Stakeholders reported that some schools were offering work experience on a "needs basis" (Cheryl, career adviser, outer regional low SES high school), and that "if kids want to do it, they have to go and find their own work experience" (Tia, Chamber of Commerce and industry HR business partner). A few students expressed regret at the unavailability of work experience. This situation exists despite "stacks of employers" being "happy to host students for work placement", according to Lucy, (work placement provider CEO). She added, "It's just become a bit too hard for career advisers to organise anymore; it's very time consuming."

Another result of not having sufficient time for providing career education was that certain information was favoured over others. For example, some schools focused on "university entry, preparing students for university", which meant that students not following this pathway were "left out' (Lucy, work placement provider CEO): they did not receive the career information and support that they required. In another school, information was provided to some students and not others. Justine (20, B. Science, Medical Biotech) reported that she was not provided with information about potentially highly valuable university access programs: "a lot of the programs … they would provide that information to the top-graded students; I don't remember doing a [university outreach program], never given the opportunity to do summer [university access program], or stuff like that" (Justine, 20, B. Science, Medical Biotech). Arguably, career education is inequitably prioritised for and provided to students from low SES backgrounds because of constraints on resourcing and time.

Quality school-based career education dependent on opportunity rather than strategy

Stakeholders highlighted that the provision of career education in schools can depend on opportunity rather than strategy. The reasons for these are threefold. First, many schools do not have a curriculum for their career work, and therefore do not have a guide for strategically providing career education. University outreach officer Arielle indicated that without a high school careers curriculum with outcomes that must be met, career outcomes were not being planned for or achieved. She highlighted how a curriculum-based approach can achieve positive student outcomes: "every other course or subject … has a full curriculum with, you know, 75 tick boxes that have to be met, and because of those tick boxes, those things do get met" (Arielle, university outreach officer).

Second, the provision of career education often depends on external organisations, which means that it varies from year to year, from region to region and from school to school. Nicola, a career adviser at a rural low SES high school, commented that in her school they "utilise a lot of outside mentors and that sort of thing, which makes it a little bit difficult

because we've got to depend on when they can come". This was echoed by other stakeholders. In these situations, career provision depends on opportunity.

Lastly, some career education opportunities are dependent on grants which are not always available and also take considerable time and skill to apply for and receive. Cheryl, a career adviser in an outer regional low SES high school, recounted the effort and time required to take advantage of grants opportunities:

> *I applied for Adam Newman [independent career information provider] … fully funded from the school-to-work grant. I applied again this year .... But … as a career adviser, you apply for all these grants and stuff — it's more paperwork and deadlines.* (Cheryl, career adviser, outer regional low SES high school)

In her interview, Cheryl alluded to the instability of relying on grants to support school career education provision. Similarly, Arielle (university outreach officer) described the ad hoc nature of career interventions that result from provision that depends on opportunity rather than strategy:

> *Often what will happen is [that] as government funding will come in and out and one year there'll be a huge science fair … and then you'll get a few students who are lucky enough to be in the right year groups or whatever for that year. They're very hit-and-miss, and they're one-off rather than kind of ongoing. And that's quite difficult in our region because one student might get one opportunity and then the next student won't get anything like that opportunity.* (Arielle, university outreach officer)

When grants and funding are not available, schools cannot provide access to such career education activities. Cheryl (career adviser, outer regional low SES high school) recounted how lack of funding would "lock us out of quite a lot of opportunities". The absence of a curriculum and a dependence on external providers places the quality of career education at risk, as Joseph highlighted: "if they're not scheduled, if they're not timetabled, if they're not embedded lessons, if they're not consistent lessons, if they're just one-off type experiences — that can prove ineffective, I think, in my opinion" (Joseph, university outreach officer).

These findings show the need for a resourced careers curriculum for schools in low SES areas. Students in these schools need valued, monitored, and equitably and consistently delivered career education.

Theme 2: Key influencers of career education: Ownership and blame

Data collected from students, parents and teachers confirmed that each group is indeed a key influencer of career education and can be both an enabler and a disabler of effective career advice. What was also revealed was that some groups acutely perceived the disabling tendencies of others, often seeing those groups as problematic for effective career education. This has resulted in a culture of blame and a lack of ownership for career education. This section explores how students, parents and teachers influence career education, as well as how they perceive the role of other key influencer groups.

Findings related to this theme are presented under the following headings:

- Student independence and sense of responsibility
- Misconceptions about parent engagement and attitudes
- Classroom teachers as enablers
- Stakeholders as influencers of career education

Student independence and sense of responsibility

Over half of student participants in this study felt that the burden of their future was their own, and that it was their responsibility to find information and make decisions about their career and pathways. As one survey respondent recounted: “I took all the risks and chances on my own after doing my own research into careers, salaries, skill sets needed, current jobs in the industry and what degree/education I would need to boost my chances of doing well in whatever pathway I choose” (student, F, 21–25 years, double degree, #33). Another survey respondent reflected on their ownership of their career decision-making process: “I formed the ideas and told people what I wanted to do. If they knew anything, they would help, but if not, they just let me go, in a way” (student, M, 18–20 yrs., B. Science/B. Politics and International Relations, #13).

A significant number of the students who felt the burden of responsibility for career education expressed being on the journey alone, “having no-one to turn to for guidance” (student, 21–25, double degree, #33), having “limited sources/people available” (student, F, 21–25 yrs., B. Law, #31), and lacking suitable mentors, family or friends to support them. As one student wrote, “Unfortunately, I haven't had a mentor. I'd ask friends for their opinion but ultimately, I made the decision” (student, F, 31–40 yrs., B. Law, #30).

Other students felt that the influence of their family disabled a successful exploration of careers. Aran described the problems that he had consulting with family and friends during his journey and his regret at not listening more to himself rather than others around him:

> *You can ask a lot of people, so that gives you a lot of perspective. And so I felt like if I was to do everything again, I would definitely not listen to my family and I would just do what I wanted to do because I wouldn’t have had so much struggle with some of my subjects if I [had] just listened to myself instead.* (Aran, 17, B. Arts/Business)

With the benefit of hindsight, Emilia echoed the sentiment that young people need to do what is right for them, rather than looking to those around them, specifically, “knowing that what you’re doing is right for you, not comparing” (Emilia, 22, B. Public Health). However, few young people know themselves well during high school and so providing the opportunity for “self-exploration and identifying skills and interests” (Danielle, National NFP Industry Liaison) should be one of the foci for career education in early high school. This type of work early on can enable students to learn about themselves which will feed into decisions later in high school.

There was further evidence of the responsibility for career success lying with the individual student and individualising the problem of not achieving. High school principal, William identified how if students did not know what they wanted to do then this could lead to under-achievement of potential:

> *I think kids can be the biggest threat to their ideas, so if they don’t have an idea of what they want to do, then they’ll just struggle … there’s so many kids that will just under-achieve, they don’t think big picture.* (William, high school principal)

Current university student Noah echoed the idea that the onus was on him to know his options and accept responsibility for the ensuing “failure” to continue with his degree. He suggested that “Maybe I wasn’t being creative enough with my thinking or was aware of the possibilities but that’s how I felt” (Noah, 31, B. Writing).

Elaine (30, M. Education) acknowledged that her circumstances contributed to her lack of knowledge about career options but there is the sense that she felt that this was her fault or responsibility rather than a failure of her career education:

> *I wish I knew that there was a lot more career options out there … growing up a bit more isolated, doing distance ed … I guess I didn't really know a lot about what options there were other than what you could think of in your head and what you saw and what your parents did, I guess, and people you knew.* (Elaine, 30, M. Education)

Clearly, students from low SES backgrounds could feel the burden of their future was their own and could feel responsible for their own career success. Such attitudes ignore structural boundaries and inequities within which many of these individuals may exist.

Misconceptions about parent engagement and attitude

Some stakeholders perceived parents as "problematic". Comments from teachers and other stakeholders tended to be negative and highlighted problems with the students and their families, such as a lack of education and understanding about employment and further education:

> *I think that part of one of the biggest problems that we have is that because many of our population are from other countries, they don't know the process of gaining jobs outside of Centrelink within this area, so I think educating parents would go a long way towards educating their children.* (Bianca, high school project coordinator)

Bianca also criticised some parents as having "unrealistic expectations of their child" and "little understanding of the complexities of university" (Bianca, high school project coordinator). Some parents were also perceived as being disengaged or difficult to engage in careers work. "You go to all this trouble to put events on for parents and you just get a very minimal turn-up for anything" (Cheryl, career adviser, outer regional low SES high school). Furthermore, stakeholders could consider families as being poor role models due to their limited employment backgrounds:

> *Because … most of our families are on Centrelink, kids don't get modelled what it's like to have families going to work and doing night shift or earning a wage and having to do tax. And so it is a bit foreign in this area, in [region] itself.* (Bianca, high school project coordinator)

Tia (Chamber of Commerce and industry HR business partner) believed that some students were not being taught fundamental work readiness at home; Leanne felt that "it takes a lot of support to help [them] … change".

Students could also see their family background as problematic. Rhett felt that his family wasn't "normal" until his mother got a job and both parents were working:

> *I suppose we were somewhat middle to low socioeconomic for a very long time and then moved into that middle-class range, I suppose, and became a normal family of two working parents, which is still uncommon in the town I grew up in, two working parents.* (Rhett, 24, B. Environmental Science)

In these accounts there is no recognition of the broader structural stratification, such as categorisation by income, status or power, that students and their families have to contend with. Parents' perceptions could be regarded as being quite deficit or perceived as a limiting factor on students' career pathways, but this might not be the case, as discussed below.

While it is unsurprising that family is influential on students' educational and career decision-making, what came across in this study was how active family members are in this process. Family members can enable career education by attending events and finding information for their children, and through career conversations with their children as they share experiences, offer guidance and personalised advice, impart wisdom and act as a sounding board. Clearly, critical career education work occurs in the home.

Although parents often did not hold the information that their children needed, they could help them obtain it. Some parents were highly active in the process, physically attending events such as open days and interviews with their children. One parent of a secondary school student shared her intentions to support her child's career decision-making: "I intend to talk to [a] dietician/nutritionist that works in the hospital sector … go on the various websites … attend more uni open days and speak to people in that area" (parent, F, #20).

Students found this approach helpful, supportive and encouraging:

> *Once I said I wanted to go to university, they were researching everything and anything, and then as soon as they found out that it was open day, like, "Right, let's go. We're going to get one of everything kind of subject so you can work out what you want to do." I think that was very helpful and motivating.* (Leia, 22, B. Communication and Media/B. Creative Arts)

There were also accounts of parents being active in finding relevant information and passing it on to their children. Current university students were grateful for the active role their family members took in helping them. "[My mum is] right behind me, finding this for me to read and stuff" (Emilia, 22, B. Pub. Health).

> *My mother's an aged care nurse.... When I … was questioning whether I did want to go into the health care profession, she gave me a whole bunch of resources…. I was just really grateful; [it was] really helpful to get that sort of stuff.* (Mary, 18, B. Nursing)

Many parents and significant carers were described as being highly active as participants in career conversations with their children. They took up roles as guides, advisers and "sounding boards" — roles generally ascribed to school career advisers. Parents guided students in the process of decision-making, which could be highly supportive. "My mum was very helpful. She made sure that I looked at lots of different degrees before I chose mine" (student, M, 18–20 yrs., B. Science/B. Engineering, #1). Parents imparted wisdom and shared their life experiences with their children. One parent recounted, "My wife and I have drawn on the experiences of those around us, our own work history and reflection on things we find rewarding or interesting" (parent, M, #4). Noah valued the advice his father had given him, which he found was "a good way of looking at it when you're thinking about your career and that" (Noah, 31, B. Writing).

Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of their children, family members could also offer broader perspectives and individualised advice. "I relied on my parents to help with career decision-making … they knew my interests and abilities" (student, F, 18-20 yrs., B. Applied Science, #39). A mature-age student valued the perspective of his partner, as "she can look at it from a different perspective" (Samuel, 25, PhD).

However, this is clearly a complex and individualised situation, with familial influence differing across participants in this study. Family career conversations could involve parents pushing forward their opinion, with some students experiencing significant pressure from their family to pursue a particular educational path. Natalie wanted to leave school in Year 11 but her father pushed her to stay and told her, "Well, you can't sit around and eat chips on the lounge" (Natalie, 19, B. Soc. Sci./B. Psych.). Lucinda experienced similar pressure:

> *My dad said I can't live with them if I don't go to university; he was really firm about it, but it's been good for me because I'm not a very motivated person — if he hadn't done that, I would still be at home.* (Lucinda, 21, B. Politics/Industrial Relations)

Other families were more neutral in their stance during career conversations. Some students reflected on their parents offering general support, noting that they felt "really good" (Daphne, 22, B. Politics/Industrial Relations), and "chill about it", characterising it as their parents just wanting them to be happy. "They were like, 'Do what you want as long as you're

happy at the end of it because your happiness is better than any amount of money'" (Liam, 17, B. Engineering).

Some students' experiences of family influence on career decision-making were quite passive. Family members might have acted as an inspiration for them or a source of "hot knowledge" (Ball & Vincent, 1998) in the form of stories and experiences. "It was just like they were like a role model — you look up to them and then you kind of just want to follow in their footsteps" (Liam, 17, B. Engineering). Indeed, "parents could be a source of specific career exposure and information for their children. My father … often described the feeling of being able to help other people and the opportunities I would be exposed to if I decided to work as a radiographer" (student, F, 26–30 yrs., B. Medical Radiation Science, #25).

Clearly, important career education work occurs in the home amongst families. However, despite the significance of this work, there appears to be an absence of connection between school-based and home-based career education. Parents of students from low SES backgrounds report having little or no information about careers or interaction with their children's schools about careers: "I haven't received any information whatsoever" (Parent, F, #15). Indeed, out of the 32 parents who answered the question "Describe the level of interaction or support that you received from your child/ren's school to support post-school decision-making", just under half (n=15) felt that they had received *somewhat below* or *far below average* support (Figure 5).

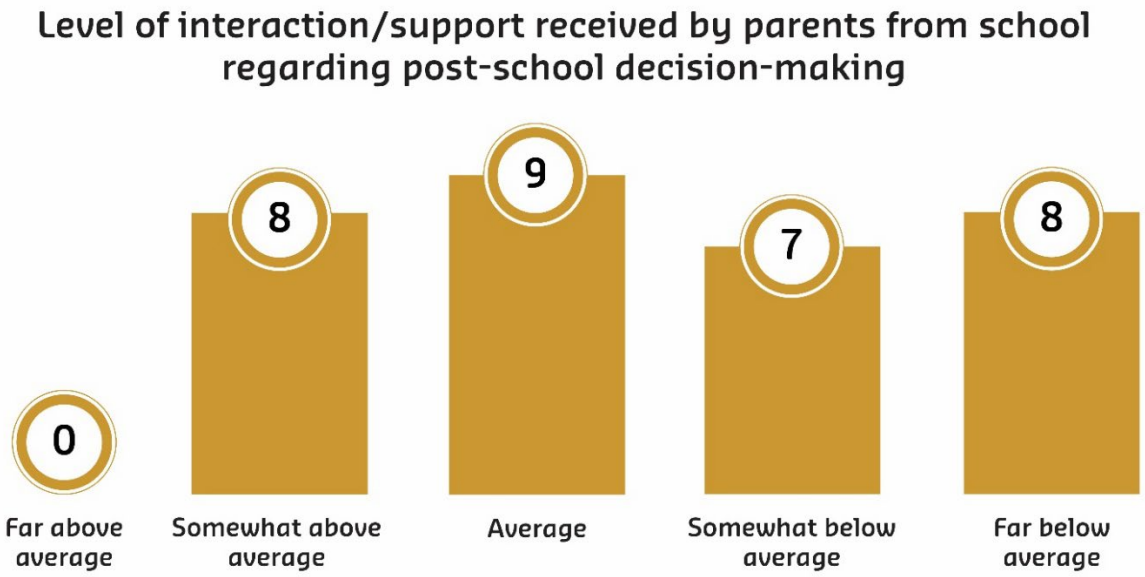


Figure 5. Level of interaction/support received by parents from schools regarding careers

In the absence of involvement with the school, parents felt that they had to draw on their own resources to support their children. "I haven't received any information personally. I research any information I require myself" (parent, F, #18). Like many of the students, as described above, "parents feel like they're 'left totally by yourself, making it up as you go along'" (Naomi, parent of 10-year-old).

Our data clearly indicated that many family members played a profound role in the career and educational decision-making of young people, yet schools often appear to have weak connections with these key influencers in the field of career education. To best support students from low SES backgrounds who might have limited access to familial knowledge, schools should proactively develop relationships with parents and caregivers and engage with them in program co-design and implementation. The development of relationships might occur through increasing school communication with parents about career education in the school and the importance of a parent's role at home. Consulting and collaborating with

parents in the development of career programs might occur through surveys, meetings, a committee and individual recruitment of parents as role models, mentors or speakers.

Classroom teachers as enablers

Both students and parents in this study also reflected on the profound influence that school teachers have on students' career and educational journeys. Classroom teachers' roles can include being positive role models, inspiring, cheerleading, motivating and instilling confidence. In these ways, they are enablers of effective career advice. Teachers are often "looked up to" and described as "strong" or positive role models. For example, Leia's education took a new direction because of a teacher who, like her, had a disability. Leia's teacher became a role model and inspiration for her to attend university:

> *… talking to my HSC teachers, they were really supportive of me going to university, and one of them was also dyslexic. So when I found that out, I was like, "Oh, wow, I can do more than just finish high school." So, I think that was a big turn for me in Year 11.* (Leia, 22, B. Communication and Media/B. Creative Arts)

There were many references to subject teachers "instilling desire" and "inspiring" students through sharing the teachers' own fields of interest and experiences. Rhett shared how his science teacher inspired him to study his degree:

> *I wanted to work in science and research because the influence that teachers had over us pretty much was like, "This is the coolest thing ever, in science", going to his science class, and "That's what I want to do".* (Rhett, 24, B. Environmental Science)

High school principal Michael shared how he intentionally created a teaching environment rich with diverse lived experiences for the benefit of students' aspirations and career decision-making:

> *… what I try and do when I employ is to find people who are excellent teachers and are qualified teachers, but they've done some other things as well. And I reckon that sort of enters the ether — kids and teachers can talk about stuff from a broader perspective.* (Michael, high-school principal)

There was evidence that teachers also play an influential role in their students' futures when they instil confidence and act as a cheerleader and motivator for the student to work hard and achieve. For example, a survey respondent wrote: "A handful of wonderful teachers certainly encouraged me to do my absolute best" (student, F, 18–20 yrs., B. Arts, #34). Another student acknowledged the benefits of being "pushed" by a teacher: "in Year 8 when a teacher of mine pushed me to discover what I could achieve" (student, F, 18–20 yrs., B. Medicine, #5). For one student with dyslexia and Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a teacher's influence was transformational:

> *… in primary school … it was a massive struggle to be able to learn. I didn't actually learn to read until I was 12 and that was in high school when I'd just moved to [city] and I had a really great teacher, Miss [name], who really encouraged me to read and to get the best out of my education that I could.* (Yolanda, 23, B. Psychology)

Clearly, teachers can change the course of a student's life. It may be that teachers can recognise qualities and abilities within students that the students themselves cannot perceive. Through this understanding of the student's individuality, teachers can nurture students' personal and career growth. For example, one student, who described herself as "a bit rebellious", experienced a teacher who was a "little more understanding as to maybe why and pushed me to be the best version of myself" (Natalie, 19, B. Social Science/ B. Psychology). For another student, her Year 8 teacher "played a major role" in helping her determine her career path, "as they helped me realise that I did have the ability to do this

career that I always wanted to, but didn't have the confidence to allow myself to strive for" (student, F, 18-20 yrs., B. Medicine, #5).

Career adviser Rosalie summarised how the achievement of students from low SES backgrounds occurs when classroom teachers support, encourage and celebrate them:

> *So, it's a very important thing, but when it comes to kids who are from low socioeconomic areas, it's giving that support that "You can do this" and giving them the strategies of how and when they see success of past students and that it's celebrated that adds to them being able to achieve.* (Rosalie, career adviser, low SES high school)

This might be particularly important in regional areas with traditional or limited career aspirations: "I did have teachers that pushed me to follow my goals due to them being very atypical of what most rural/country kids want to do" (student, M, 18-20, B. Science/B. Politics and International Relations, #13).

Given this influential relationship, teachers can also have a negative influence on students and be disablers of effective career education. Farrah related her experience of this:

> *I did commerce in years 9 and 10 and I loved it, and then I started it in year 11 and I had a different teacher and I just…she was horrendous and I just couldn't keep going with it.* (Farrah, 20, B. Business/ B. International Studies)

According to Arielle, students "can become easily dissuaded from certain careers if they have a negative experience" (Arielle, university outreach officer).

Clearly, teachers are key influencers in the educational and career decision-making processes of young people and are a resource that should be developed and exploited to achieve the best support for students from low SES backgrounds. A whole-school approach to career education that engages teachers in program design and implementation and embeds career education within the curriculum of each subject is advocated to achieve this.

Stakeholders as influencers or enablers/disablers of students' career choices

Stakeholders could act as either enablers or disablers of student's career choices. For students who already knew what they wanted to do, engagement with stakeholders such as universities affirmed and enabled them to reach their career goals. For example, for Ayla (19, pre-entry, Dip. University Study), a university college adviser was instrumental in helping her identify a career and the pathway into it. This example highlights how it is often the acts of an individual that can make a qualitative difference to a young person's goals and ambitions. In Ayla's case, she had originally wanted to "go along the psychology/social work path"; after seeking advice she was pointed towards "the Diploma of University Study". For Ayla this conversation with one person made her realise that "what I wanted to do was social work".

However, not all stakeholders had a positive impact; this again underlines how an individual can have a huge influence on young people at this point in their life. Leia grew disillusioned with a career in marine biology when it was assumed that she was not smart enough based on her marks at the time, which were a result of illness and unsupported dyslexia:

> *I was talking to one of the biology people in the stalls and … [they said,] "Oh, they're not very good marks. You obviously probably shouldn't do this career — maybe think about something else," and for me, [that was] very, like, demotivating.* (Leia, 22, B. Communication and Media/B. Creative Arts)

For students who were unsure of their future, engagement with stakeholders helped to build their awareness of their own interests and future career possibilities, as well as the

knowledge and skills to get them there. Parent Naomi recounted how university enrichment programs provided her son with opportunities for coding and robotics that he might not have otherwise had. University outreach programs also influenced aspirations; for example, one student noted that "frequent involvement with [university access] programs in Year 11 and 12 sparked my interest about attending university. My thoughts began to change from 'Will I attend university?' to 'What will I study at university?'" (student, F, 21–25 yrs., PhD, #12). University programs in schools also positively affect students' self esteem and confidence. One parent noted about their child, "Her experiences during [university enrichment programs] and university student programs have provided her with a sense of a level playing field and boosted her self-esteem and restored confidence" (Parent, F, #19).

This section has shown how parents, teachers, career advisers and the students themselves can be key influencers of career education in both enabling and disabling ways. The enabling power of key influencers needs to be harnessed via best practice approaches to career education that allocate ownership and responsibility to all stakeholders and overcome a culture of blame.

Theme 3: Careers partnership work: Strengths and challenges of two models

In this study, students, parents and stakeholders made many references to career education activities that involved universities, not-for-profit organisations, vocational education providers, government agencies and industry bodies. These collaborations constituted a partnership approach to the provision of career education. Two main approaches to career education partnership work were identified:

- a school-centred, hub-and-spoke model
- collaborative, multi-stakeholder partnerships.

This section discusses the benefits and challenges of each of these models in providing quality career education for students from low SES backgrounds.

School-centred, hub-and-spoke model

In many of the descriptions of partnership work, the school sat at the centre of the partnership and engaged with other stakeholders to develop a suite of career education opportunities that they would offer to the students in their school. Benefits and challenges were identified in the analysis of the data in this hub-and-spoke approach to partnerships.

The benefits that the participants identified in the school sitting at the centre (or hub) of the partnership were the increased exposure to authentic career education opportunities beyond the school environment and a reduced workload placed on the schools given their limited resources for career education.

Participants described the increased exposure to authentic career education opportunities beyond the school environment as a primary benefit of partnerships that had been established between the school and other key stakeholders. Exposure to such experiences is widely recognised in the literature (Australian Government, 2019; Career Development Institute, 2015; Joyce, 2019; Kashefpakdel et al., 2018) as a means to broaden students' understanding of the world of work. Parents identified that their children's engagement with programs offered by their local universities gave them "an experience of uni life" (parent, F, #19). Similarly, Joseph, a university outreach coordinator, identified that engagement with universities and vocational education providers built students' familiarity with, and sense of belonging to, tertiary education environments so that they "understand that university or TAFE is for them, and it's not just for certain students who traditionally have accessed higher education" (Joseph, university outreach coordinator). School career advisers also described "industry visits" and "school-based traineeships" (Rosalie, career adviser, low SES high

school). Both Nicola and Cheryl (school career advisers) affirmed the need for increased exposure to career information beyond the school environment, as it helps to get students "out there…. [so they think] 'Oh yeah, I could do this'" (Nicola, career adviser, rural low SES high school) and that they are "hearing stuff from outside people, not just from the teachers" (Cheryl, career adviser, outer regional low SES high school). Participants in this study identified that partnerships between schools and key stakeholders acted as a vehicle to offer authentic career education opportunities beyond the school environment.

A lack of resources is frequently cited as a problem for the provision of career education in schools in Australia (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017; CDAA, 2012; CICA, 2015). This was affirmed by participants in this study; however, many schools identified that partnership models allowed them to achieve more than they could on their own, and could assist in alleviating school resourcing challenges for career education. School career advisers in this study identified the organisation of work experience as a significant challenge in terms of workload, despite identifying how important such authentic career education experiences were for students. Tia, an Industry representative, recognised:

> *… that teachers don't have time to go out and engage with businesses, but we know the businesses don't have time to engage with multiple schools or multiple teachers at the same time. So, it's an area that really needs dedicated resources.* (Tia, Chamber of Commerce and industry human relations business partner)

Bianca, a careers project coordinator in a high school, described the benefit of working with a local organisation to organise work experience, stating how it had:

> *… been really great for us because they have the time to one-on-one case-manage students and get them out into work experience, and it takes little effort by the school then to be involved in it.* (Bianca, high school project coordinator)

Whilst it is acknowledged that career education is under-resourced in schools, partnerships with other organisations can result in dedicated resources to enhance the career education opportunities on offer to students.

The challenges that were identified within the hub-and-spoke approach to partnerships included a narrow insight into a particular pathway or profession and the approach's reliance on the career adviser having well-established professional networks on which they could draw.

This approach often results in schools partnering with a limited number of tertiary education providers or industry contacts, rather than the full spectrum of opportunities available within and outside a student's community. Cheryl described the difficulty of engaging with all of the stakeholders in the local community:

> *… council down here don't do very much at all as a careers network … it is very difficult to actually engage a lot with industry down here because the industries that are here are not suitable for students at high-school level.* (Cheryl, career adviser, outer regional low SES high school)

Partnerships between schools and individual stakeholders often provide limited exposure to particular pathways or professions. This can occur where an industry develops programs as a pipeline into their organisations or fields. Schools largely describe selecting from a "menu of activities" offered by the external partner to develop their career education approach, rather than seeking to influence or co-design the opportunities that are offered to their school. Joseph refers to these as "a suite of outreach programs that we offer … there's a whole heap of opportunities for students to partake in outreach or in-reach activities"

(Joseph, university outreach officer). Such programs can be narrow, and may not meet all students' needs or interests.

Therefore, whilst individual partnerships exposed students to opportunities outside of the school environment, the exposure to pathways and professions could be limited, and could depend exclusively, or nearly exclusively, on the career adviser to engage with those stakeholders, or on the stakeholders' willingness to engage with certain schools.

Further, hub-and-spoke partnership models relied on the professional network of the individual career adviser to develop relationships with various stakeholders. Bianca described how she had developed contacts "that are specific to various racial groups — Aboriginal contacts — and if we had females, I know that there's a lot of female contacts out there" (Bianca, high school project coordinator). On the other hand, Michael and Nicola described how their contacts actively "tap their school on the shoulder" for career education opportunities, as they "often get phone calls from local employers saying, 'you got anybody who wants…?'" (Michael, high school principal); or "council rang — 'We've got a full-time apprenticeship for next year. Have you got anybody in mind?' and I can immediately go back to my notes and say, 'Well, this one's a mechanic, this one, this one, this one' and then I contact them and let them know that it's a possibility" (Nicola, career adviser, rural low SES high school). Therefore, access to career education opportunities largely relied upon the social capital and networks of the individual career adviser, rather than a purposeful and coordinated approach to ensuring students had access to a wide range of career education opportunities.

Collaborative, multi-stakeholder partnerships

To a lesser extent, participants referred to collaborative, multi-stakeholder partnerships managed by a separate organisational entity. Whole-of-community, place-based approaches drew in schools, universities, vocational education providers, not-for-profit organisations and industry within a particular region to co-design and co-implement career education within the schools and local community.

The benefits of whole-of-community approaches to career education were a combination of the clustered approaches to careers that a multi-stakeholder approach could offer and opportunities for co-design and co-implementation that allowed for each of the stakeholders to tailor career education opportunities to the needs of their students.

Participants described a separate organisational entity that acted as a partnership broker to bring together schools, universities, vocational education providers and industry in a local region to undertake a holistic approach to career education. There is evidence of similar approaches working positively in the UK Widening Participation context (Sellar & Storan, 2013; Thomas, 2010). Danielle described these organisations' function as "the conduit, or the intermediary role of trying to connect that and bring that together" (Danielle, National NFP Industry Liaison). Through this whole-of-community approach, Danielle described the benefit of providing students with career education opportunities, where they:

> *… identify a career cluster that they'd like to learn more about, and then they'll go through and have three intensive workshops; one will be a … university focus, the other will be a TAFE focus, and then the third one is an industry-specific focus — they might all be in a health cluster, for example.* (Danielle, national NFP industry liaison)

In addition to the focus on different pathways and occupations, stakeholder Fern also identified the benefits of engaging with multiple universities, so that they can provide the right advice and "best fit" for students wanting to pursue a higher education pathway, serving as a centre where they can "talk to a lot of different departments in multiple universities" and gain "more advice with multiple institutions" (Fern, director, regional NSW not-for-profit).

Therefore, multi-stakeholder, whole-of-community partnerships increase to multiple pathways and professions that students can explore.

Study participants highly valued opportunities for co-design and co-implementation of career education activities as ways to tailor career education opportunities to the needs of the students in their school or region. Participants engaged in multi-stakeholder partnerships described mechanisms such as partnership meetings as an effective way to achieve co-design and co-implementation. Danielle said:

> *We'd have representation from TAFE, [university], and business and industry, employment providers, not-for-profits, all sorts of people around the table, and they come together and that meeting is chaired by … Regional Development Australia…. schools talk about some of the upcoming programs and career interventions that they've got happening within their school, and the opportunities for the local business community to support that, and so it's connecting the two together.* (Danielle, national not-for-profit industry liaison)

Partnerships can increase opportunities for students and their parents to access information and experiences, tailored to aspirations and needs at critical moments in their educational journey. Multi-stakeholder, whole-of-community partnerships provide increased opportunities for students to explore "career clusters" rather than specific pathways or professions, and are underpinned by mechanisms for partnership work, rather than relying on the social capital and networks of individual career advisers. By undertaking multi-stakeholder, whole-of-community approaches to career education partnerships, programs that are tailored to the needs of the local region and that recognise the differing needs and goals of diverse learners can be provided. Through establishing separate organisational entities, such as RUCs or local community organisations, to act as a pivot point or broker for multi-stakeholder partnerships, programs can coordinate partnerships across universities, industry and TAFEs to present schools with a multiple-provider partnership-based model for providing career education. This approach to partnerships enables more students from all backgrounds to achieve their educational and vocational goals.

Theme 4: Pathways and transitions: The need to support choice and flexibility

This section explores current university student participants' experience of transitioning from school and the pathways that they have taken so far. We use the term "so far" intentionally to highlight that university enrolment or graduation is not a final destination but part of a lifelong journey of education and training. This section discusses students' experiences of planning and preparation for their post-school journeys under two themes:

- Diverse and individual journeys
- Choices and preparations for multiple pathways

Diverse and individual journeys

In contrast to a predefined pathway or linear journey into a predetermined job, participants in this research described diverse and individualised school-to-work routes. Students switched between work, training and study, exploring options through trial and error, and "working it out" as they went. For example, Lucinda (21, B. Politics and International Relations) had changed universities once and degrees twice; as she explained, this pathway was simply a result of "working it out as I go". While this meandering pathway may suit some students, for those who are already financially constrained, changing degrees may not be an option.

Analysis of the student visual maps and interview transcripts highlighted the various factors that disrupted the pathways, plans and trajectories of these young people. These included:

- school subject availability, selection and success
- illness: mental and physical
- aspiration uncertainty
- being pushed and pulled by various influences.

School subject availability, selection and success can affect students' pathways. Aran's (17, B. Arts/ B. Business) first preference of subjects for his senior years were not available to him, with implications for his HSC success and university entry:

> *And then Year 11 subjects came and so I chose earth environmental science, chemistry, bio, math and English and I didn't end up getting all of those subjects…. I ended up picking history extension and science extension to make up for it, which was really hard.*

Justine (20, B. Science) also ended up studying the "wrong" subjects. She described how she was poorly advised on which subjects to take in her senior years, which had implications for her success in her first year of university and subsequent progression through her degree:

> *Unfortunately, though, going into Year 11 and 12, I found that I didn't do all the subjects that I wish I had done; I wish I had known that I should have done chemistry. It was an option of mine but my careers adviser was like "Look, because you weren't so great in science for Year 10, it's probably not a good idea that you take on two sciences" — because I had already chosen biology so I chose hospitality but that meant I came in to uni and in my first year, I had to do bio and chemistry and I ended up failing chemistry so it put me a year behind already because it's a prerequisite for, like, everything.*

Similarly, Mary, (18, B. Nursing, 1st year.) was poorly advised and did not take subjects which would have given her the required content and prerequisites for her degree. "I did not have any science subjects backing behind me which is a struggle now but I'm getting there." These cases demonstrate how school subject availability, selection and success can affect the pathways of students from low SES backgrounds.

Illness—both mental and physical—as well as disability, affects students' trajectories. During her first year at university, Justine (20, B. Science) experienced three medical problems, which led to her failing subjects and questioning of her sense of belonging at university:

> *… during the first break before exams, I had a really bad asthma attack, which put me in hospital, and from there, I had all these different medical conditions that arose from that. And it was a very difficult time for me because I'd always had asthma but nothing else. So, it was just like I had three different medical conditions that arose within a month of each other, and going in to spring session, I ended up failing another subject. And also going into autumn last year, I did fail another subject there because of that transition of having to deal with personal issues and uni — it was very hard.*
>
> *So, at the end, once I got to the end of spring session in first year, I thought, "Maybe I shouldn't be doing this," and I thought, "Maybe I just need to get away" — you know, those instant thoughts where you're like "Oh, maybe I just need to remove myself from the situation and everything will just become better".*

Justine's illness triggered reflection on whether she should attend university, and then thoughts about where and what she should study. Eventually, after being accepted at another university and attending orientation there, Justine realised that she should stay at her current institution but study a different major, a decision that she was happy with. "I

changed to medical biotech, which will allow me to go into my career choices and potentially honours [and a] PhD, which I would like to do. And that equals happy me."

Elaine's (30, M. Education) disability has shaped what she can study as well as how long it had taken her to study it:

> *My pathway was kind of influenced by disability in that I never finished my education degree; I did … the Bachelor of Ed Studies because I was too unwell to do all my … prac…. So, I … decided to do Honours, loved the research — a little bit too much – and that's pretty much been my focus ever since. But it hasn't been particularly easy. It took me three years to do my Honours degree; four if you count the year I actually took off to start with, and really just health has been influencing ever since then.*
>
> *I finished in 2014 – it's 2020, so it's taken me six years and I still haven't got through my Masters yet…. I've had heaps of PhD offers but it just hasn't worked out with my health.*

For Elaine, ill health has meant that she has experienced an interrupted and drawn-out journey through higher education. Ayla (19, Dip. University Study) has also experienced disrupted education due to health. She took an alternate pathway into university (a one-year pathways program before entering her planned B. Social Work) because of her mental health, which interrupted her ability to physically attend school.

> *I have traces of autism and then I've got anxiety and fear and OCD, and so I could really struggle at times at school…. And then I went to eSchool for my anxiety and the help that I received there was incredible.*

Thus, health and disability can be a strong force influencing students' trajectories, resulting in non-linear pathways to higher education.

Students' uncertainty over what they want to do, i.e., their aspirations and goals, results in shifting and non-linear pathways for some students. Natalie (19, B. Social Science/ B. Psychological Science) described her journey as "chaotic"; this appears to refer to her aspirations and goal-directed activity. Interestingly, the pathway in her visual map (Figure 6) has loops in it — not a linear and straightforward pathway, but one that twists and has decisions that have created circular patterns.

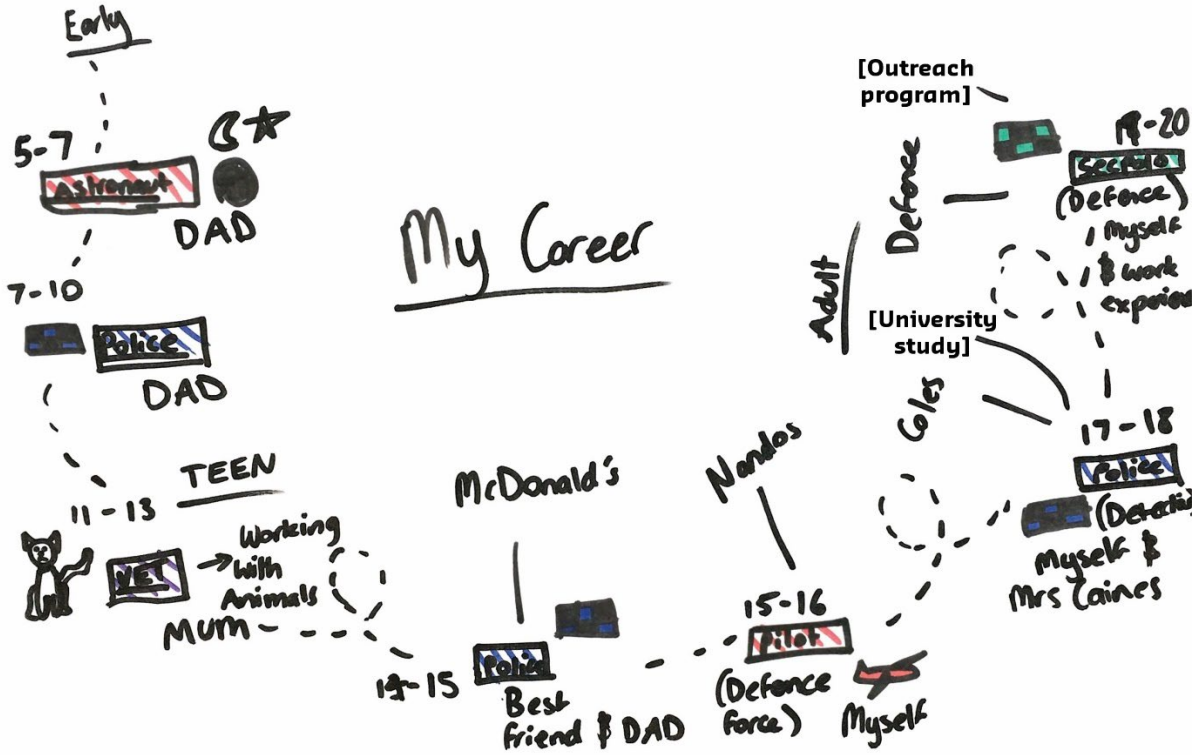


Figure 6. Visual map of career and educational journey (Natalie)

Natalie's aspirations switched back and forth over her life, from astronaut to police officer, to vet, back to police officer, then to pilot, again back to police officer, then to serving in the Australian Defence Force. She is currently working towards being a security police officer. Natalie's map depicts a journey with many influences, uncertainty, trial and error and fluidity.

Still early on in her further education, Mary (18, B. Nursing) has already changed her aspirations. Upon leaving school she had been accepted into a double degree (nursing and paramedicine), but she had deferred her first year and took it up again as a single degree (B. Nursing), which she was just commencing at the time of being interviewed. "I did technically start off with a double degree of nursing and paramedicine, but I realised my passion really lies in nursing." Here Mary suggests that she was unclear about her aspirations at the time of applying for courses, but that they became clearer over time.

Some students described being "pushed and pulled" (Corbett, 2007) by various influences, which has set them up for non-linear pathways. Before even attending his first lecture, Aran (17, B. Arts/ B. Business) already has ideas about changing. "I'm doing arts and business and right now, I'm hoping to transfer into international commerce." Aran is trying to negotiate his school marks, career opportunities, and interests with the opinions of his family about what he should do.

> *I didn't end up getting [my first choice of HSC] subjects so my family ended up deciding for me instead. They told me to do modern history and they also wanted me to drop music so I did that and I was really unhappy about it…. At that point, my friend was like, "Oh, why do you have to listen to them? It's your life," so I ended up dropping maths because I didn't like it; I only did it because they wanted me to — I ended up picking history extension and science extension to make up for it which was really hard.*

> *I guess the reason I chose that I wanted to do marketing was [that] I did a lot of research because I kind of knew that I wouldn't get the ATAR to get in, so I was like, "Oh, I should try and get into the pathway," and so I found a degree that was as close as each other as possible so that I wouldn't lose any credit when I transferred.*

Clearly, these pathways cannot be characterised as linear and unproblematic journeys through school into further education. These students from low SES backgrounds experienced switching between work and study and changing goals, aspirations and courses of study as a result of factors such as school subjects, illness and key influencers. Career advice that acknowledges and reflects these journeys is required.

Choices and preparations for multiple pathways

Career education that "narrows" the options of students was a theme that emerged in the research. Students and stakeholders voiced their experience of an underlying expectation that just one overriding career or pathway could or should be chosen. For one student, "picking" a unique or sole pathway was difficult and confronting:

> *I was told on several occasions that a particular career path was over-saturated and to "choose a different interest", which was a bit shocking to me: how are you supposed to just pick something else?* (student, F, 21-25 yrs., PhD, #29)

The strain and unnaturalness of choosing one career was also described by Ned (19, B. Arts). "To be honest, I really didn't know [what I wanted to do] but due to high school and college, having the thing of, like, making you like, 'What do you want to be?', I kind of forcefully chose hospitality."

Indeed, students described experiences of being funnelled into particular pathways. For example, at school, Liam (17, B. Engineering), received advice about trades but was not provided with information about academic pathways. A survey respondent recalled the careers service helping people "who wanted to get part-time jobs or apprenticeships" (Student, F, 18–20 yrs., B. Arts, #34). At the same time, but in other schools, Lucy, a work placement provider in a NSW regional town, witnessed the emphasis on higher education pathways:

> *I think these days … it's more about university entry, preparing students for university, and the ones that are not going to go to university are left out* (Lucy, CEO, work placement provider)

Indeed, there is evidence that university study was being promoted as the preferred post-school pathway, with trades and vocational education being undervalued (Education Council, 2020; Joyce, 2019):

> *… because teachers are a product of the higher education system, there seems to be a tendency to encourage students to go onto higher education when that's not always the most suitable pathway for every student…* (Rosalie, career adviser, low SES high school).

Instead of being funnelled into certain pathways, students commonly desire career education that provides them with choices. For students in this study, career advice was about having options: a Plan A and backup plans, so that they have alternatives if their first choices do not eventuate. Career advice for these students was preparing them for multiple possible pathways rather than trying to tie them to one pathway. Overwhelmingly, when asked what they had wished they had known in high school, current university students responded that they had wished they had known about alternative pathways and that "ATARs aren't, like, the be-all and end-all" (Jasmine, 18, B. Information Technology). "I think in high school, especially at the start of high school, I wish that I had known that there were so many more

pathways available to me…" (Yolanda, 23, B. Psychology). The university students interviewed also mentioned a gap in the knowledge they were given about alternatives; for example, Samuel (25, PhD) reflected on having a "narrow, naïve view" when first entering university. Similarly, a parent of two agreed that "there are many pathways. You don't have to know the job, just the area you are interested in" (Parent, F, #11). The university students interviewed had a much broader, holistic view on pathways than they had had in high school:

> *… you don't need to know what you want to be straight away; you can venture out and try different things without thinking that if you get into something, that's what you need to follow, no matter if you like it or not.* (Alex, 18, B. Nursing)

University outreach officer Arielle suggested that students need to be told that "it's okay to change your mind, or to change direction, and that that's really normal…."

A key message for providing career education to school students should be that alternative entry points into courses and careers do exist, and that fluid pathways are not only possible, but normal. In the current climate, career advice can no longer be focused on guiding students in one direction; rather, it should aim to provide students with choices. Indeed, for students from diverse backgrounds whose education can be disrupted by caring and family responsibilities, disability and illness or financial issues, having options is critical for educational access and career development. Career advice for these students should prepare them for multiple possible pathways rather than trying to tie them to one journey.

Theme 5: The unique experiences of students from low SES backgrounds in regional, rural and remote areas

Of interest to this project was the specific experience of the career education of students from low SES backgrounds who live in RRR areas. Significant proportions of students and parents participating in this study identified as being from RRR areas, and many stakeholders worked in or with RRR communities (Table 9).

Table 9. Stage 2 participants from RRR areas

PARTICIPANT TYPE	NUMBER FROM RRR AREAS	NUMBER WORKING IN OR WITH RRR COMMUNITIES
University students	44	n/a
Parents	4	n/a
Stakeholders	n/a	11

Participants from, or working in/with, RRR areas reflected on career education issues or experiences specific to students from those communities. This section discusses the circumstances and contexts that affect the delivery of career education in these areas.

Participants reflected on how seeking work and training opportunities in smaller communities can be informal, intimate and somewhat less demanding. For example, Arielle (university outreach officer) suggested that apprenticeships are acquired "by knowing someone through the footy" rather than via "an application that comes up in the paper". As a result of the different processes in gaining work and training in small communities, skills such as networking are vital to success. Willow (industry education relations adviser) confirmed that social capital "comes into play" in regional areas. Arielle further suggested that "networking skills and things like that are just as important in an area like ours as your resume-writing skills — probably more important". As a result, students in small communities need to be explicitly taught the specific skills needed to acquire work and training experiences in their local communities. It may be that students are provided with structured opportunities to network, meet potential employers and form connections in the community.

In regional communities there is a reported intimacy and familiarity between students, teachers and community members which is unique to small/medium sized towns. Nicola (career adviser, rural low SES high school) suggests that "we know their backgrounds and we know all about them". Furthermore, local businesses/industries in RRR areas want to invest in local people which supports investment in educating and training youth. "We'd much rather spend the time up-skilling people that are local because they tend to stick around longer" (Willow, Industry Education Relations Adviser). Knowing students and a willingness for business to hire locally has advantages for career support and the matching of students with career education which would suit them.

In rural and isolated communities, knowing businesses and key people in the area is an important way to gain work and training opportunities. However, the conditions described here might create an environment in which students and career education providers rely on networks, networking and social capital, excluding the development of skills and knowledge to seek work more formally. A multi-stakeholder partnership approach, as described earlier in this section, might offer a level playing field in situations such as this.

Another theme participants revealed was that high unemployment and intense competition for jobs has serious implications for the educational and career decisions students can make in RRR areas. Arielle suggested that when jobs are "hotly contested" and where gaining sufficient paid work to pay the bills is challenging, young people can be deterred from pursuing further study. "It is difficult for people to be able to even support themselves, let alone look at studying for the future" (Arielle, university outreach officer).

As Arielle said, difficult employment conditions in small communities mean that some students might need to prioritise supporting themselves financially, potentially limiting their options. Career adviser Cheryl also suggested that this approach was necessary and that some students would be better off finding an apprenticeship or full-time work:

> *If they can actually get an apprenticeship or some full-time work, they would be best off doing that because jobs are far and wide and not a lot in this area. Like, the population of [town] itself is only 3,000 and it's very, very few jobs.* (Cheryl, career adviser, outer regional LSES high school)

Young people might also be limited in their options due to being responsible for bringing in income for their family:

> *… if the family is out of employment and [the students] become part of the factor of bringing money in too, so a decision gets thrust upon them, if you're [facing a] career decision, so they might start looking at casual work earlier or they're thinking, "Well, I need to leave school earlier because I need to support family".* (Rosalie, career adviser, low SES high school)

Limited employment opportunities also present challenges for young people from low SES backgrounds who live in RRR locations, potentially limiting their post-school options for both work and further education.

For youth who do choose further education, geographic barriers—that is, long distances from cities and regional centres—create tensions and necessitate a choice about whether to stay in their hometown and travel long distances, or study remotely, or to leave their home community for a larger centre. Arielle describes the push-pull for youth from low SES backgrounds in RRR locations wishing to pursue further study: "… with low-income families, it's very expensive to go away … and studying online can be really daunting…" (Arielle, university outreach officer).

Cheryl saw most of her students leaving to study in the capital city or interstate. As Rhett said, these locations can be physically very far from home. "Being where I'm from, you have

[major city interstate] three hours one way, [major city] three hours, [major city] six hours" (Rhett, 24, B. Environmental Science). It was with sadness that Emilia described having to be away from her community to pursue her area of interest:

> *… it is a little bit hard in that those sort of things are focused more in places like here in [major city] with the [organisations], and that sort of thing, but yeah, I don't know, I'd like to be out in the rural communities.* (Emilia, 22, B. Pub. Health)

Indeed, many young people from RRR areas value their close-knit and supportive communities and the attractiveness of their locality (Webb, Black, Morton, Plowright & Roy, 2015), and there is evidence that rural youth have "a greater sense of connectedness, place attachment and community" (Corbett, 2016, p. 278). Thus, being from a RRR location should not be conflated with absence or deficit, but a certain set of circumstances and values that require nuanced support mechanisms. Career education support needs to reflect and work with the individual characteristics of RRR areas to ensure that this support is meeting the needs of the students within that community.

This section has shown that being from an RRR community has unique impacts on the way work and training opportunities are gained and how employment opportunities affect choices for work and study, and on the practicalities of further study.

Conclusion to findings

This section has presented the findings from the project, which together present a comprehensive picture of current career provision for students from diverse backgrounds. In summary, this section discussed how effective career education is currently not consistently available to all students; that there is a lack of ownership for career education and a culture of blame for its weaknesses; that multi-stakeholder partnerships are best able to support students' achievement of their educational and vocational goals; that students experience diverse and individualised pathways into work and further education, and value exploration of multiple options and opportunities which enable them to overcome disruptions; and that students from RRR areas face a unique context for transition to work that requires of them different skills and decisions.

Having identified a range of issues in Stages One and Two of the research, the project team commissioned five pilot programs to explore innovative approaches to career education for students from low SES backgrounds. Table 10 illustrates the themes addressed by each pilot program. A snapshot of each program is presented in the next section.

Table 10. Issues in current career education addressed by Stage 3 pilot programs

Program number	Program Name	Theme				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Beyond the role of career adviser: A teacher professional development program	■	■	■	■	
2	Industries of the future: A university preparation intervention for non-school-leavers		■		■	■
3	Careers Breakfasts: A career-information program for parents of high school students		■	■	■	
4	Find your future focus: A place-based career education program for high school students	■	■	■	■	■
5	Explore your future: A career exploration and mentoring program for primary school students	■	■	■	■	

Theme 1: Effective career education
Theme 2: Key influencers of career education
Theme 3: Careers partnership work
Theme 4: Pathways and transitions
Theme 5: The needs of students from RRR areas

Case studies of best practice

Stage 3 of the project sought to design, implement and evaluate pilot programs with the aim of further refining and understanding best practice career education for students from low SES backgrounds. This section provides snapshots or short overviews of each pilot program, including the key learnings from their implementation and evaluation. A full account of each program, or case study, is available here. The programs are:

- Pilot program 1: Beyond the role of career adviser: A teacher professional development program
- Pilot program 2: Industries of the future: A university preparation intervention for non-school-leavers
- Pilot program 3: Careers Breakfasts: A career-information program for parents of high school students
- Pilot program 4: Find your future focus: A place-based career education program for high school students
- Pilot program 5: Explore your future: A career exploration and mentoring program for primary school students

Pilot program 1: Beyond the role of career adviser: A teacher professional development program

The University of Wollongong designed, implemented and evaluated a high school teacher professional development (PD) program with the aim of embedding CDL in the school curriculum to achieve a whole-school approach to effective career education for students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds. Evaluation of the program found that the program increased teachers' knowledge of career terms and roles and confidence in having career conversations with students, and broadened their attitudes and intended practices towards a whole-school approach. CDL was a term that was already being utilised by university staff engaged in this study to inform career-related activities in the higher education environment. The extension of the use of CDL into the high school context resonated with the school staff engaged, as they were able to visualise how career education in schools could contribute to a lifelong approach to CDL. Assessment of the delivery of the program indicated that it could effectively engage a relatively high number of teachers in the workshops, particularly given the limitations and disruption caused by COVID-19. Suggestions for how the program might be delivered even more effectively include the need to measure the longer term, ongoing impact of the program in the school.

Pilot program 2: Industries of the future: A university preparation intervention for non-school-leavers

The University of Tasmania partnered with industry to design, implement and evaluate a CDL intervention for non-school-leavers in the University's enabling programs. The aim of the intervention was to expose students to Tasmanian "industries of the future" to expand their career knowledge and develop their aspirations. Evaluation of the program found that it achieved its aim to increase knowledge of careers of the future, but that students wanted further information and support about pathways into those careers. There were also mixed responses to the online delivery of the program, which was necessary due to COVID-19 restrictions. Future iterations of the program should be expanded to include a session on pathways and providing students with individualised information about subjects, courses and pathways into their field of interest. These future iterations should also consider ways to better support students who have limited access to the technologies required to engage with online learning.

Pilot program 3: Careers breakfasts: A career-information program for parents of high school students

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) partnered with parents of current UTS students from equity backgrounds (parent ambassadors) to provide career-information sessions (Careers Breakfasts) to parents of secondary-school students. The Careers Breakfasts program aimed to support aspiring students in their pathway to higher education, and to empower parents to support their children in their educational and career journeys. A post-intervention survey was administered to parents who attended the Careers Breakfasts sessions, and analysis showed that the sessions helped parents in their awareness of career options for their child and in their confidence in supporting their child in their career decisions. The research identified the need for future program iterations to be expanded to consist of a series of workshops on topics identified by parents as being useful; offer workshops online and in the early evening as a mode of delivery that would suit many parents; emphasise activities that stimulate parent participation and discussion with other parents; and include activities that connect high-school parents with employers.

Pilot program 4: Find your future focus: A place-based career education program for high school students

The University of Canberra designed, implemented and evaluated a CDL program for high-school students with the aim of encouraging them to become more future-focused. In this program, students in years 7 and 8 in two schools, one low SES regional and one rural, participated in a series of lessons around developing student knowledge and understanding possible local careers, and highlighting the connection between valuable school subjects and career pathways. Although COVID-19 affected the implementation of the program, overall it positively changed students' understanding of local careers and career pathways. Specifically, the program increased student awareness of local jobs and careers and their confidence that they might be able to get the job they want in their location; the importance of grades and subject selection; the importance of doing well at school and selecting valuable electives; and the role of TAFE/university in pathways to work. One area for future development is students' understandings about school subjects and their relationship to knowledge in local industries. Overall, this program shows the potential for the success of a locally driven career-education outreach program and highlights the role of universities in providing students with access to career education.

Pilot program 5: Explore your future: A career exploration and mentoring program for primary school students

The Australian Catholic University designed a CDL program for primary school students with the aim of supporting their exploration of careers and fields of study at university. ACU partnered with a local school to co-design the program to meet the specific needs of students in years 5 and 6 at that school. Specifically, ACU was asked to design in elements that challenged gender stereotypes about occupations and fields of study, and to create activities to stimulate student reflection. When allowable according to COVID-19 restrictions, the program will be implemented and evaluated. At that time, students from the school will visit an ACU campus and interact with the University Student Mentors. Qualitative data will be collected through focus groups involving University Student Mentors, primary-school student participants and their teachers, and the success of the program will be evaluated.

Discussion

This section draws together the findings from the project and considers them through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction and in light of the context of the study and key literature. Through this discussion, recommendations for policy and practice will be identified and highlighted, providing a clear rationale for recommendations relating to the provision of CDL for students from LSES backgrounds. The discussion is presented in five sections:

- Career Development Learning: A contemporary vision of career education
- Mapping responsibility and ownership for CDL
- Quality of CDL in schools
- Implementing CDL through multi-stakeholder partnerships
- Design principles of CDL programs, activities and advice.

Career Development Learning: A contemporary vision of career education

As identified earlier, historically, *career advice*, *counselling* or *guidance* referred to one-on-one interactions between an individual and a career professional (Hooley et al., 2015), and was the extent of career work. Today, career terminology, such as *career education* or *career learning,* better reflects the process of learning involved in careers work undertaken in schools. Clearly, career education has evolved, but as this project found, it still remains poorly defined and described. Furthermore, the language of career education is diverse and inconsistently applied both in Australia and internationally. Issues concerning the language and definition of career activity has implications for how it is understood, funded, enacted and ultimately experienced by students, particularly those from LSES backgrounds.

We propose that the concept and term Career Development Learning (CDL) be implemented consistently across Australian career-related activities to usefully clarify, connect and direct endeavours across sector, political and geographic boundaries. CDL was initially coined in 1999 in the work of Tony Watts as well as of Wendy Patton and Mary McMahon, and has been widely adopted as the preferred term for career-related learning in the Australian higher-education sector (McIlveen et al., 2011; Patton, 2019; Smith et al. 2018; Watts, 2006). CDL is defined as:

> *learning about the content and process of career development or life/career management. The content of career development learning in essence represents learning about self and learning about the world of work. Process learning represents the development of the skills necessary to navigate a successful and satisfying life/career* (McMahon, Patton, & Tatham, 2003, p. 6).

Importantly, CDL does not see planning and management of one's career as a separate activity to that of planning and managing one's life. The goal of CDL is achievement of a successful and satisfying career and life. Within this framing, career work cannot be done in isolation from the individual context of a person's life. Career work must be personalised, place-based and drawn from the specific strengths, aspirations and goals of the individual. CDL is a concept that recognises the need for student-centred, inclusive, context-specific career work.

The findings from this study and the application of CDL in the five pilot programs further enhanced the understanding of CDL and how it must be contextualised to meet the needs of students from LSES backgrounds. This contextualisation includes: (1) adopting a long-term approach to CDL; (2) explicitly teaching students the "hidden" discourses to navigate the

world of work; and (3) planning CDL in intentional ways that increase access to CDL for all students.

This study identified that for students from LSES backgrounds, the need to introduce CDL early in a student's life is critical. CDL also points to careers work that must be long-term and ongoing throughout one's life. With this view, young people should be given the earliest possible introduction to career/life management and continued support through primary, secondary and tertiary education and beyond. CDL can begin from a young age and scaffolded in age-appropriate ways across the student life cycle. A pilot program designed as part of Stage 3 of this study ("Explore your future – A career exploration and mentoring program for primary-school students") identified the need for CDL to commence early in order to challenge gender stereotypes concerning various occupations and provide a platform for students to explore a range of careers and fields of study. In addition to this, through interviews with parents, teachers and students, Stage 2 of the project highlighted the importance of following up CDL throughout secondary school, particularly at critical decision-making points, such as subject selection or when making decisions about post-school pathways.

This study highlighted the need to explicitly teach students how to navigate the "hidden" discourses about the world of work, including the opportunities available and the skills required to make informed decisions. This might involve being exposed to different jobs, industries and workplaces and learning about qualifications, skills and attributes needed for different positions. Equally as important is learning about the self; one's strengths and interests. Acquiring this type of self-knowledge also builds one's social and cultural capital, an important way to achieve equity. Equally, CDL encompasses the development of skills required to navigate a successful career and life. However, skills taught as part of careers work must be more than generic resume-writing and job-application techniques: they must include competencies that add to social and cultural capital that, crucially, should be place-based and contextually nuanced. Examples of such skills identified in this project included the specific skills needed to navigate job markets in informal and intimate small communities; successfully engage with a self-directed approach to career advice in schools; and manage changes in the labour market (Foundation for Young Australians, 2018b; MCEECDYA, 2010; Skillsroad, 2018).

Access to CDL cannot be left to chance; rather, it must be planned in ways that enable access for all students. Whilst the literature identifies that the broader concept of CDL, including content and skill learning, may occur with or without intervention (McMahon et al., 2003), this study shows how appropriate and intentional career services and programs, informed by best-practice CDL, can improve educational and vocational outcomes for all students and reduce inequity and disadvantage. Participants in this study frequently cited time and a lack of resources as a problem for equality of access to career education in schools (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017; CDAA, 2012; CICA, 2015; Hooley & Dodd, 2015; Moote & Archer, 2018; Youth Action, 2017). This study also found that insufficient resourcing resulted in students "being left out" and "falling through the cracks" when career advisers had to make difficult and limiting decisions about what to focus on and what to leave out. For example, in some schools certain information was favoured, and work-experience opportunities were unavailable (as detailed in the discussion of Theme 4). Other examples were provided where only targeted cohorts of students within the schools were invited to take part in university visits, or access to other types of authentic career experiences with vocational-education providers or industry. An inquiry into career-advice activities in Victorian schools (Parliament of Victoria, 2018) suggested specific guidelines for schools that articulate the level of career education students should receive, based on the numbers of students enrolled within the school, as well as the level of education within the school.

In summary, the concept of CDL differs from traditional conceptions of career education or advice, offering a coherent framework that can be applied across the human lifespan in all sectors – early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education, VET and industry, and that can be used consistently in policy, practice and research. However, this study highlighted ways in which CDL needs to be contextualised to enable students from LSES backgrounds to access CDL and the knowledge and skills required to navigate the world of work from an early age, across the student life cycle. This study contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of CDL for diverse groups of learners.

Recommendation 1: *The Department of Education National Careers Institute to implement the concept and term Career Development Learning (CDL) consistently across Australian career-related activities to usefully clarify, connect and direct endeavours across sectors and political and geographic boundaries.*

Mapping responsibility and ownership for CDL

Guidelines for the provision of career education in Australian schools is fragmented, with provision and programs varying between states, education systems and schools (Australian Government, 2013a, 2019; Parliament of Victoria, 2018). A national framework of career competencies to assist in program design and evaluation exists in the form of the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (MCEECDYA, 2010), and a set of professional standards and benchmarking resources for school career programs (CICA, 2014) has been developed by the national peak body for the career industry in Australia, the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA). However, neither of these frameworks is compulsory, which arguably is a contributing factor to the inconsistent provision of career education in Australian schools reported in this research and elsewhere (Dandolo partners, 2017; Parliament of Victoria, 2018).

Consistent CDL provision requires a clear map of responsibility, ownership and accountability. As revealed in this research, a culture of blame or lack of ownership for career education can exist in some educational institutions, with students feeling the burden of their future being their own; parents being seen as problematic in their children's career decision-making; teachers not understanding or acknowledging the importance of their role as career influencers; and other stakeholders, such as university outreach programs, perhaps having enabling influences but not necessarily available to all students, and potentially being too focused on higher-education-related pathways.

Both schools and broader systems, including families, seem to have a lack of ownership and accountability for career education. Particularly for students from LSES backgrounds, a discourse of responsibility for career success attributed to the individual student ignores the structural boundaries and inequities that systems and structures put in place that inhibit students from achieving their career and life goals. Given the very diverse circumstances within which students may exist, we propose that responsibilities and accountabilities are mapped across *schools, parents* and *students* to ensure parity of support and access. These responsibilities could also extend to community and industry bodies; however, examination of what this might look like was outside the scope of this project.

Responsibility for CDL should recognise that the career adviser is the facilitator, rather than the sole provider, with the responsibility for career work shared across the school. Yates and Bruce (2017) found evidence that in NZ some subject teachers did not recognise the importance of providing career education, and as a result resisted involvement. Furthermore, some NZ teachers held negative views about career work in schools, including considering career activities as mandatory tasks to be completed and impositions on their teaching duties (Furbish & Reid, 2013; Yates & Bruce, 2017). As part of a whole-school, or "infused"

(OECD, 2004, p. 12), approach to CDL, teachers are encouraged to take on the responsibility for making links between subject content and careers, as well as having career conversations with students. If they receive these messages consistently, they will more broadly recognise the shared responsibility of preparing students for their post-school transition.

PD, ongoing training and initial teacher education can be avenues for making a classroom teacher's role in CDL clear to teachers. One of the pilot programs implemented during Stage 3 of this study ("Beyond the role of career adviser: A teacher professional-development program") demonstrated the effectiveness of such a program in increasing teachers' knowledge of career terms and roles and their confidence in having career conversations with students, and broadened their attitudes and intended practices towards a whole-school approach to CDL. CDL can also be included in teachers' position descriptions and curricula to ensure that these responsibilities are a recognised and agreed part of the job.

Parents should also be engaged, with clear ownership and responsibilities attributed, to effectively deliver CDL alongside schools, career advisers and classroom teachers. Parent/teacher relationships and communication must be emphasised and planned. Parents need to know how it all works and what role they have. The pilot program implemented during Stage 3 of this study, "Careers Breakfasts: A career-information program for parents of high-school students", demonstrated how parents can be empowered to participate in their children's career decision-making by increasing their knowledge and confidence.

Students themselves should also have shared responsibility, alongside their parents and other supporters, as well as their teachers, in the provision of CDL. Shared responsibility for careers can be integrated by adopting a students-as-partners (Matthews, 2017; Mercer-Mapstone & Marie, 2019) approach to CDL delivery, in which students are consulted during the development of a school CDL plan and the design of individual programs and activities. A students-as-partners approach also involves students in the implementation and evaluation of CDL, including creating mentoring opportunities between senior and junior students.

The following section explores the issue of the quality of career-education provision in schools and identifies ways it could be improved.

***Recommendation 2**: The Department of Education National Careers Institute to develop a plan for CDL that clearly articulates the responsibilities of schools, parents and supporters and external stakeholder groups across the student life cycle*

Quality of CDL in schools

Career education in some schools has been identified as being of poor quality and not adequately preparing students for life after school (Parliament of Victoria, 2018). This has been attributed to the lack of professionalisation of the role of the career adviser within schools and a limited focus on evaluating the impact of career-education activities at a national and school level.

A factor that may contribute to the inconsistent quality of career education in Australian schools is a lack of clarity around the role of the career adviser (Parliament of Victoria, 2018), including the absence of specific, clear job descriptions for this role. This situation is repeated in both NZ and the UK (Career Development Institute, 2015; Furbish & Reid, 2013), with career advisers reporting little clarity about their role and professional identity (Yates & Bruce, 2017). In Australia, school career adviser skill and qualification requirements vary between states and education systems. The NSW Department of Education do not

have a definitive position description for career advisers, only an optional framework for performance that is applied only at individual schools' discretion (Youth Action, 2017). Catholic and Independent schools have no external guidelines or policies for career guidance, with individual schools, making decisions about whether to hire someone as a career adviser and what standards to uphold (Youth Action, 2017). In rural, remote and isolated schools with challenges of high staff turnover, younger and inexperienced staff, inexperienced leadership and teachers working outside their area of expertise (Downes & Roberts, 2018), a position description for career advisers is essential to guide work in the role and maintain continuity of activity between bearers of the position.

We recommend the creation of a national position description for career advisers in schools. This position description should clearly outline the key duties and tasks of the job as well as the qualifications, knowledge, skills and experience required of the person. The position description is an opportunity to highlight the "soft skills", or personal attributes, needed for being a successful career adviser. A position description should acknowledge the "invisible" work of relationship-building that successful career advisers do, as well as the personal attributes that make a person approachable, personable, relatable and warm. A position description would also allow for accountability, benchmarking and performance review.

In addition to a clearer position description, qualifications and ongoing PD for career advisers are also necessary. PD might be as simple as ongoing, planned contact with particular industries and jobs to stay up to date with future skill needs and job- and education-related opportunities.

Another recommended component of best practice is that career programs be self-reviewed and evaluated on their outcomes and success to ensure that students are being prepared for further education and employment (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017; Joyce, 2019; Moote & Archer, 2018; Yates & Bruce, 2017). Joyce (2019) found that the best-performing international career programs had an evaluation component that informed the ongoing delivery of the program. Standards and quality-assurance processes for both services and practitioners support effective career development services and enhance career development outcomes (Australian Government, 2013a).

An innovative suggestion for CDL planning, reporting and accountability includes the development of individual learner profiles (Education Council, 2020; O'Connell et al., 2019) or educational passports (Bolton, 2019) to provide a trusted, consistent way of representing the full range of young people's attainments during their transition years (within school and beyond) across a broad range of domains. Students could use their individual learner profiles to help "identify their strengths and weaknesses while they are still studying, and use these both to set goals and see how their profiles match up to potential pathways" as part of a "pathways planning process" (Education Council, 2020, p. 49). For the provision of quality CDL, these would be seen as an essential element that would support the needs of every student.

***Recommendation 3**: The Department of Education National Careers Institute to work collaboratively with state-based education departments to enhance the quality of CDL in schools and, in turn, the post-school outcomes of all students.*

Implementing CDL through multi-stakeholder partnerships

Multi-stakeholder partnerships have the potential to alleviate inequities and support the consistent, quality provision of CDL. Partnerships allow for the equal valuing of all post-school pathways when they are impartially led; however, success in this endeavour requires clearly defining effective partnership practices.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships that are impartially led can increase opportunities for schools, students and their parents to access information and experiences that are tailored to aspirations and needs at critical moments in the educational journey. Often career education partnerships occur between two organisations, such as a school or university, and can result in the information and experiences being tailored to one education or professional pathway as the primary outcome, informed by organisational goals or motivations. Multi-stakeholder, whole-of-community partnerships have the opportunity to overcome organisational motivations and allow the stakeholders engaged to focus on the best post-school outcomes for the student. There have been examples, such as the Queensland Consortium for Widening Participation (Zacharias & Mitchell, 2020) and the Aimhigher Partnerships (HEFCE, 2008) where this has been achieved. It has resulted in separate, independent organisational entities being established that act as a broker or a pivot point for multi-stakeholder partnerships. This has then enabled students to explore a variety of post-school education pathways and employment opportunities, shifting the focus to “career clusters”, rather than specific pathways or professions. Such approaches to CDL partnerships allow CDL to be tailored to the needs of the local region and reflect the differing needs and goals of diverse learners. In the current Australian education policy context, organisations such as the RUCs or community organisations such as The Smith Family, could provide a potential option to coordinate partnerships across universities, industry and vocational education providers to present schools with a multiple-provider partnership model. This approach to partnerships enables all students to achieve their educational goals.

To complement this work, high-level definition and guidance on what a partnership is in this context—that is, multi-stakeholder webs (Putnam, 1993) of organisations with complementary capabilities—is required. Formal clarity around the definition and nature of partnerships is required for them to be successfully taken up and formed.

Higher education is often viewed as a more prestigious educational pathway (OECD et al., 2019); however, higher education is not necessary for all jobs, and many people find vocational education more appropriate. Indeed, VET is essential for providing pathways to skilled employment in many industries. This research found that often students were funnelled into a particular pathway, and that often university was promoted as the preferred post-school pathway, and trades and VET were undervalued (Education Council, 2020; Joyce, 2019). The type of school a student is attending can inform the priority focus in offering direction; for example, university versus VET or employment (Fuller et al., 2014). Additionally, some teachers view particular pathways as holding more value than others, which may affect the type of guidance provided (Parliament of Victoria, 2018; Fuller et al., 2014). In these cases, this can result in limitations to the information and options offered to students. Similar to other studies (Skillsroad, 2018), students in this study desired choice and career advice that provided them with information on all pathways and options for their future. CDL should provide students with choice.

The language and advice associated with higher education needs to be carefully considered. It is necessary to avoid unintentionally positioning "going to university" as a guaranteed "route out of poverty" or placed as an aspirational objective that is only positive. There are many difficulties along this pathway and there are no guarantees of social mobility or positive graduate outcomes. Higher education should not be constructed as the solution or end destination for all students; rather, it should be offered as one of many options that the individual learner can consider.

***Recommendation 4**: The Department of Education National Careers Institute to define effective partnership practices within the context of CDL, identifying the need for partnerships to be led by "impartial" stakeholders; for example, Regional University Centres or other independent bodies.*

Design principles of CDL programs, activities and advice

This study, in line with others, has found the quality of career education programs to be inconsistent (Australian Government, 2013; 2019; Parliament of Victoria, 2018). Best practice CDL involves programs, activities and advice that are student-centred and place-based, and that normalise non-linear journeys.

All students should be exposed to a wide variety of career clusters that reflect the skills needed today and in the future. For example, transferable enterprise skills such as digital literacy, problem solving, and creativity are sought by employers today and should be highlighted to students (FYA, 2018a). The pilot program implemented during Stage 3 of this project, "Industries of the Future: A university preparation intervention for non-school-leavers", educated students in Tasmanian university pre-access courses about growth areas in the state, which resulted in students expanding their knowledge of possible future in-demand industries and potentially triggering changes to their field of study. As recommended by the Education Council in the recent Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training, the focus of CDL should be on providing every student with the broad transferrable knowledge, skills and attributes they need for learning, life and work (Education Council, 2019a).

At the same time as students are exposed to future career clusters and the skills, the discourse and language around CDL needs to be changed to reflect the range and type of new and emerging careers (flexible and multiple) (FYA, 2018a; LSAY, 2019; MCEECDYA, 2010; OECD, 2016) and the diverse and individualised pathways that exist. School-to-work pathways have changed dramatically, and traditional routes to work have been described as irrelevant (Education Council, 2020; FYA, 2018a; International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy, 2017; Raciti, 2019; Ranasinghe et al., 2019). In the future, young people will have to engage and reengage with post-school education throughout their lives (Bolton, 2019; O'Connell et al., 2019), and CDL discourse needs to reflect this. For example, instead of asking students, "What do you want to be when you grow up?", they should be asked, "What will you do first?"

CDL provision should be focused on activities that are relational and authentic; for example, mentoring, "speed dating" with various career types and work experience, rather than "lessons" on careers. Additionally, there should be purposeful and structured opportunities for career conversations, including mentoring. As a number of studies have recommended, there should be a commitment to work-integrated models of learning through school–industry partnerships (Dawkins, Hurley, & Lloyd, 2020; Education Council, 2019a; FYA, 2018a; OECD, 2016; Torii, 2018).

One way of achieving relational and authentic CDL is through alumni, as representative members of the community, who could be effectively mobilised to provide students with relatable role models and sources of information. Schools should be provided with strategies and approaches designed to proactively engage with alumni through simple but effective means. For example, schools could have a page on their website where parents, carers and community members could register their interest in speaking to groups of students, sharing experiences, or mentoring. Sharing experiences might involve young people who are working in the community speaking with students about their career pathways. A bank of short video clips of people talking about their career and education journeys could also be valuable to supplement face-to-face activities.

The findings from this research identified that students from some communities, particularly those from small communities in RRR locations, experience unique contexts of work and study. These unique contexts require specific skills, knowledge and decisions with regard to careers and educational pathways. Furthermore, as evidenced in Pilot Program 4, “A place-based CDL program for high-school students”, students respond differently to career education programs depending on their location (for example, rural town or regional centre); have differing knowledge bases to draw from in imagining their future career options; and have horizons of aspirations that are tied to place. In response, CDL needs to be place-based and responsive to the needs of students in those areas.

***Recommendation 5**: Schools and key stakeholders, such as universities, vocational education providers, industry and community organisations to design CDL programs in ways that are student-centred and place-based, and that reflect the non-linear journeys that characterise the world of work.*

Conclusion

Underemployment and lengthy transitions to full-time employment are part of the problematic pathways that many youth experience in their journey from school to work. As the economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, “there is a pressing case for programs targeted at the young to improve their prospects of employment when the economy recovers” (Borland, 2020, April 15), and now, more than ever, education and training pathways are critical to the long-term success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

CDL is particularly important for young people because career programs within the secondary school curriculum “can impact on a young person’s sense of direction and meaning in life” (Broadbent et al., 2012, p. 126). Furthermore, it engages them in learning, retains them in school and helps them to attain good academic qualifications (Andrews & Hooley, 2017; Broadbent et al., 2012; OECD et al., 2019). This is particularly important for those who are at risk of disengaging from school (Australian Government, 2013b; O’Shea, 2019).

Quality CDL has the potential to lessen the gap in educational and employment outcomes between students from low SES and high SES backgrounds (Australian Government, 2013a; Bajada & Trayler, 2014). This may be even more important for those young people living in areas with scarce post-school educational and employment opportunities (Cuervo et al., 2019).

The Bridge Group (2017) claims that without tailored career programs, equity measures for students from low SES backgrounds will not be met. Equity goals include Sustainable Development Goal 8, to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” (United Nations, 2020) and Goal 4, to have “inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2020). Quality CDL is a pathway to the achievement of both goals.

However, as this study has shown, current career education for students from low SES backgrounds suffers from a variety of issues that need to be rectified. The research showed that effective career education for students from low SES backgrounds is a game of chance; there is a culture of blame and lack of ownership for career education amongst key influencers; there is a need for collaborative, multi-stakeholder careers partnerships and for supporting student choice and flexibility; and there is a need to recognise and respond to the unique experiences of students from RRR areas. The recommendations from this project aim to address and redress these issues to achieve better outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds.

Continued research would measure the impact and further inform best practice career policy and programs for students from low SES backgrounds. Specifically, longitudinal research is required to monitor how CDL during secondary school affects the destination of students in the medium-term; that is, to what extent students stayed on the pathway that they identified during their senior year. This would assist schools in assessing the success of their programs and guidance as well as promoting accountability for CDL. Additionally, research is required to understand the needs and capabilities of industry and community bodies as they relate to partnership work with schools. Such research will further support quality CDL provision for all students, but particularly those from low SES backgrounds.

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