



Identification of issues that impact upon the provision of effective career development services for VET learners

A Research Paper for the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA)

*Hugh Guthrie and
Lisa Nechvoglod*

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR
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Any interpretation of data is the responsibility of the author/project team.

Executive Summary

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Hugh Guthrie and Lisa Nechvoglod, NCVET

This paper examines the role of career development services in the light of recent reports by Skills Australia and the last federal budget. While recognising that career development services are required across all age groups and in all sectors of education, both Skills Australia and the budget have placed a particular emphasis on the role of vocational education and training (VET) as one of the agents of improved productivity and both social and economic change. The paper draws upon the most recent research and policy both in Australia and internationally.

Key findings

- Career development services are important because they give people the best opportunity to manage their own careers, respond to changes in the labour market and maintain their work-life balance. With the current emphasis by Skills Australia and others on the role of skills for lifting productivity and social inclusion, it is timely to consider strengthening the place of career development in VET to assist all groups of learners, but especially those turning to VET for a second chance.
- Furthermore, VET providers have good links with industry, which can be an advantage when advising people on their career options in their industry. This knowledge, used in conjunction with that provided by qualified career guidance practitioners, would help people to choose courses and career directions for which they have both the ability and the aptitude. This may also contribute to increasing the level of course completions and improving the match between skills and appropriate employment.
- With the growing trend towards many career changes across people's lives, these career development services need to be life long. It is, of course, important that young people have access to formal and informal career advice to inform their early study and work choices. For older people career services can be particularly significant at times of change in their life and employment. Thus, careers are not so much about planned 'pathways', although they can be. They may also be the product of complex, sometimes 'chaotic', non linear and unplanned influences.
- With an increasing focus on individual entitlement to education and training in VET funding models it is important that individuals develop career management competencies as a core generic skill. In addition, entitlement funding has to be sufficiently flexible to reflect the reality of career pathways, including access to meaningful training at higher, the same, or even lower AQF levels than those an individual currently holds.
- Technology has an important role to play in providing quality career information to a wider audience. Approaches should be considered that make use of the technologies and communication mechanisms used by those requiring career advice.

- Career development is relevant to people in all walks of life. However, access to appropriate services by disadvantaged groups can pay particular dividends in helping to reach those at greater risk of making poor transitions or becoming disengaged from the workforce. Of equal importance is the need to establish approaches that will encourage and support them to take up these opportunities. Thus,
- ‘Wrap-around’ services – which can range from child care, transport, access to disability groups or mental health facilities – provide vital support, and need to work in partnership with career development and other support services. However career development services are, arguably, one of the most important because they give individuals a framework in which to grow and develop at key times in life.

In summary, this paper suggests the following ‘ways forward’:

- Recognising career management skills as a fundamental employability skill for all individuals and incorporating it in VET courses
- Developing well-integrated, well-publicised, high quality, comprehensive, readily useable and accessible career information that use available communication technologies well
- Having a cascading level of service delivery, including comprehensive career development services that are targeted at the most vulnerable ‘at risk’ groups
- Developing genuine and comprehensive wrap-around services, with career development as a central focus
- Building better approaches to sharing resources and expertise, especially through more effective networks and partnerships
- Having appropriate initial and ongoing training and professional development for career development professionals and others, especially those who are key influencers in career decisions
- Having better career counselling at or around enrolment for VET programs, and on-going access throughout their VET course and as part of the transition to employment or further study
- Increasing the focus career development professionals give to employers and their role in the career development process
- Better evaluating the quality and impact of the career development services.

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Why this paper?

The Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) is committed to promoting career development in the VET sector, both to help individuals reach their highest potential and to achieve the wider goal of skilling Australia. In a position paper from 2007, CICA argues that career development is important because:

Well organised career development services have a significant contribution to make the effective operation of Australia's education systems, to the efficient operation of its labour market, and to the effective development and use of talent of the nation's talent and skills (CICA 2007, p.6).

The link between career development and VET is highlighted in the 2002 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report *Why Career Information, Guidance and Counselling Matter For Public Policy* (working draft #1) which states:

Well-organised career development services are particularly important in post-compulsory education. Here, wider curriculum choice results in more diverse and complex routes into later stages of education, into employment, or into both. Where choices are more complex and their consequences are more costly, effective advice and guidance on educational options, and on links between these options and later occupational destinations, can help to better match individuals' learning choices to their interests, talents and intended destinations (p. 3).

Career development also has the potential to enable people to better use their skills. In its 2010 paper *Australian workforce futures*, Skills Australia looked at ways of meeting the additional demand for skills, by improving workforce participation, raising foundation skills and ensuring better use of individuals' knowledge and skills in the economy and the workplace. Skills Australia's 2011 paper, *Skills for prosperity: a roadmap for vocational education and training* focuses on the pivotal role of increasing training capacity for a significant component of Australia's workforce, whether through initial training, retraining and up-skilling.

This emphasis on skills development was reiterated in the May 2011 budget, which included the key element: 'Continuing to invest in the economy's productive capacity through better and more targeted skills and training, and new measures to boost participation'. In particular, the government is focusing on groups who have little attachment to the workforce and is seeking ways to increase their participation. These groups include single and teenage parents, disadvantaged job-seekers and the long-term unemployed. Government is also offering better support for apprentices to help increase the overall completion rate for apprenticeships.

The VET sector can give individuals the skills and knowledge necessary for sustainable jobs in a changing labour market, as was highlighted in many of the initiatives in the recent federal budget. It works in partnership with enterprises to develop skills which will make workplaces more productive. The sector's objectives are to:

- increase the skills and capability of individuals so they can reach their full potential in a challenging social and economic environment
- deliver the skills required by industry and promote the ambition of Australian enterprises to be world class in productive and innovative practices
- support civic participation, social inclusion and regional economic development across communities (Skills Australia 2011, p.28).

To facilitate effective training, it is important that learners have clear goals and can align their ability and aspirations to the learning they undertake. However, as Bretherton (2011) argues, VET is an 'inert ingredient' in career transitions and is not enough on its own to swing the balance in finding individuals meaningful and fulfilling employment, especially for those in marginalised groups. It might be argued that, particularly in these cases, VET training needs to be complemented by a range of other fit-for-purpose intermediate services, especially those concerned with career development.

Better matching of skills to industry and individual needs requires better information about emerging opportunities and trends. A key means of achieving this vision is providing individuals with access to career development information, advice and related services¹ either through the VET sector itself or through partnerships with a range of other agencies. This will ensure that individuals are able to make the best training and career decisions possible – and act on them – at critical points in their life. Policies of lifelong learning emphasise the importance of individuals developing the skills to actively manage their careers in order to make better career decisions.

Traditionally public career services have focused on young people, but it must be recognised that they are not the only ones who need access to career development opportunities. This means that many people may miss out, especially those who do not think in terms of ‘career’. Those suffering some measure of social disadvantage are even less likely to access such information. VET has an opportunity to put in place more extensive career development services or specialist advisors who can help those who are at risk of not being able to develop their career management skills or have the opportunity to carve out their own career pathway.

‘At risk’ groups who would benefit from such advice include:

- young people at risk, especially those who have left school before completing Year 12 (early school leavers)
- unemployed adults and those not in the labour force, who – by circumstance or choice – are detached from the workforce
- employed adults considering a career change for a variety of reasons
- older adults and their need to remain productive members of society in later life. If this involves changing the nature of their work, older people need to be able to make informed decisions about new roles they might like to undertake (plumbers or electricians are an example of older workers who may need to change occupations due to the physical nature of the work).

Some of these groups have been a particular focus of the recent budget, which include initiatives to:

- provide services to assist single parents², teenage parents^{3,4}, early school leavers⁵ and those in jobless families⁶ to access training, gain skills and enter the workforce.
- promote Indigenous youth career pathways, focused on extending school-based traineeships.
- cater better for the needs of disadvantaged learners and regions through the establishment of the new National Partnerships.

Another budget initiative is designed to enable registered training organisations (RTOs) to carry out skills assessments and then, where relevant, provide appropriate training to address skills gaps to those mature workers with trade relevant skills but no formal qualifications⁷.

Other reforms in the training system promoted by Skills Australia and others, for example an entitlement funding model and the emphasis on improving course completion rates, would be well supported by adding the ingredient of career development, and an entitlement to it (see Brown et al 2010), into the training system. Better

¹ Services include any support that individuals may need such as counselling, extra training or even access to childcare.

² Building Australia’s Future Workforce - Services to assist single parents enter the workforce

³ Building Australia’s Future Workforce - Compulsory participation plans and support for teenage parents - targeted locations

⁴ Building Australia’s Future Workforce - training places for single and teenage parents

⁵ Building Australia’s Future Workforce - transitional activities for early school leavers

⁶ Building Australia’s Future Workforce - Compulsory participation requirements for jobless families - targeted locations

⁷ Building Australia’s Future Workforce - more help for mature age workers

counselling for students entering into study, as well as appropriate career advice along the way would help them make wise and suitable choices.

Similarly, career development services are integral to the significant investment by government into training as a solution to disadvantage. Unless this investment is preceded or accompanied by effective career development, that money may not achieve its aim.

In this paper we will start by describing briefly what careers, career pathways and their management and development involves. We will then focus on a few key questions:

- What is the current impetus to improve career development services?
- What makes for good career development, and what are the minimum levels of service required?
- What could be done better? This concluding section will look at potential ways forward, and focus especially on possible improvements to the current VET sector's contribution to providing career pathways for its participants. This may be in the form of offering specialist career services or advisors to find the necessary information; providing a coordination role to help with facilitating 'wrap-around' support services; or defining and embedding in courses a new range of employability skills to teach individuals how to envisage and develop a personal career pathway and to develop an effective range of career management skills.

Career pathways and development: what do they involve?

In this section we will briefly define and discuss the concept of careers, career pathways and career management and development. A wide variety of career information needs to be available for those seeking to forge a successful career 'pathway'.

A career is the sequence and variety of occupations, including paid and unpaid work, which a person undertakes throughout a lifetime. More broadly, 'career' can include life roles, learning and work. Career 'pathways' concern the way individuals move between jobs, vocational areas and roles, as well as through formal and informal education and training programs. Careers are a lifelong journey. However, the opportunities available depend on having a key set of foundation skills, such as literacy and numeracy, and a range of desirable employability skills, personal attributes and appropriate technical training or education. These core skills are important because they underpin the vocational programs which seek to help people reach their goals. Those suffering disadvantage can be confined to a limited range of occupational options, and trapped on a roundabout of successive lower-level qualifications which net little personal return (NVEAC 2011; Guthrie, Stanwick & Karmel 2011). Those experiencing such disadvantage need to access to career pathways which can lead to useful and higher levels of further education, employment or community engagement.

A report by the OECD in 2004 confirms that if good career development is not available, this can lead to poor employment choices and a miss-match between the skills required and the ones people actually have. It can also lead to dissatisfaction with choices and careers and people not using their existing skills. This suggests that input from career advisors may be useful when designing training programs and qualifications because of their understanding of career pathways (OECD 2004).

Career 'pathways' are rarely planned from beginning to end. Rather, they occur in a series of stages, some of which arise by personal choice and others through circumstance. In fact, career pathways are now more changeable, and increasingly less straightforward, linear and predictable (Martin 2007), being described by one set of authors more as 'crazy paving' (Harris, Rainey & Sumner 2006) than stepping stones. Other authors acknowledge the importance of chance events in career development (Bright, Pryor, Chan & Rijento 2009), and that career exploration is, in fact, the product of complex, 'chaotic', non linear and unplanned influences (Zilic & Hall 2009). Thus, at key stages in their life, individuals may need access to career information and career development advice, as well as being empowered to develop their own personal career management skills. This fits within a concept of career capital (DeFillippi & Arthur 1996) in which individuals:

- identify their own career motivations, personal meaning and self-awareness (knowing-why capital),
- develop occupational skills, knowledge and understanding needed for good performance (knowing-how capital), and
- acquire career-relevant networks and contacts (knowing-whom capital).

All three types of capital are required for effective career development and so that individuals have the ability to remain competitive and flexible and thus progress in their careers. It is about ensuring personal competitive advantage.

Thus, career development refers to a wide range of information, programs and other services. These then help individuals to gain or develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, abilities and behaviours to manage their life learning and work in self-directed ways: their career management competencies.

Career information assists the processes of career management and development. This information is related to the world of work and includes occupations and industry, education and training, and social relations. It

comes in a variety of formats: print, electronic, personal contacts and other resources. Services which support career information should provide current, unbiased facts about work roles, educational programs and work opportunities. Services can be delivered in a variety of ways including computer-based delivery systems and other communications technologies, the internet, print and media materials, interviews and workplace speakers.

Major career information services available in Australia at present include MyFuture, National Career Development Week, Job Guide and OZJAC. In addition, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is commissioning a study to investigate the feasibility of developing an online automated tool (Skills Builder) that enables an individual to manually input their skills to generate a skills profile or map. This profile may include studies completed, qualifications, and employment experiences and would be applicable to anyone seeking to further their education or change career.

Effective career development not only requires access to qualified career development practitioners; it also needs people with career development ‘skill sets’ who play a potentially vital role as key influencers. These include parents, teachers and trainers, and their networks of other students, work colleagues and friends (in other words: the knowing-whom capital). Some of these influencers have access to broad and knowledgeable networks. For others, and especially those suffering relative disadvantage, their ‘knowing-whom’, ‘knowing-why’ and ‘knowing-how’ capital may be more limited. It is these groups, in particular, who need strong professional support.

Ultimately, career development is only one aspect of the support and advice which people need; thus an integrated and individually tailored ‘wrap-around’ approach to support services is also required⁸, one which includes sound career advice. Such an approach has been strongly advocated in the National VET Equity Advisory Council’s (NVEAC) equity blueprint for 2011–16 (NVEAC 2011). This concept has also been picked up by Skills Australia, who advocate for improved resources to assist people in making good choices, such as publishing information about student services, including career advice services, for all registered training organisations on the MySkills website (Skills Australia 2011).

Finally, it can be argued that career development is important because it gives individuals a framework in which to grow and develop at key times in life. Finding a potentially satisfying vocation can also provide purpose and motivate an individual to engage in the necessary training to achieve their goals. VET training, particularly for those who are disadvantaged, can help address inadequate foundational skills or even personal issues which may be holding them back. While career development services are important, they often need to be used in conjunction with a wide range of other services which also offer personal support. One way of doing this is the model proposed by NVEAC: providing comprehensive wrap-around services within the one organisation, or through partnership arrangements between various groups. However, a range of fit-for-purpose career development and guidance models is needed, supported by informative, easy-to-use and accessible resources. An all-ages approach to career development also means that necessary services are available throughout a person’s lifetime.

⁸ These services may include mentoring, coaching, career advice, case management and customised learning, as well as assistance with transport, accommodation and referral to other support services

Why are improving career development services important now?

In this section we examine some of the key drivers for improving career development services, particularly those related to the VET sector, which hitherto has not been as prominent in the career sphere as its schools and university counterparts. This is in part due to the challenges involved in serving a diverse and geographically wide client base. The total size of the VET sector is unknown, but its scope is broad. In comparison with higher education (NCVER 2011), it has a high proportion of students who are:

- studying part-time
- Indigenous or have a disability
- of lower socio-economic status.

The sector also has:

- a broader cross-section of age, with relatively higher numbers aged 25 years and over
- a broader domestic locational spread, especially in regional and remote areas.

Career development services are important because they give everyone the opportunity to engage with the labour market and develop a career pathway. VET students may not also have had the access to the same level of formal services as those in other sectors. However, at a time when the world of work is increasingly changing and complex, individuals need help to be able to develop and transfer their skills. Career development services can aid in this process.

The importance of these services has also come under the spotlight for other reasons. These include:

- the policy push to ensure all are given the opportunity to engage in the labour market, including those from key disadvantaged groups
- the VET sector moving its funding model to one based on individual entitlement
- the links between an individual's vocational qualification, skills and their subsequent employment
- a new impetus to meet the needs of career and job change through lifelong learning.

We will now consider each of these factors in turn.

Ensuring all, and especially key disadvantaged groups, are able to engage in the labour market

Both governments and industry seek to improve labour force participation. Vocational choices and the necessary educational programs to support those choices need to be underpinned by sound career advice and other support. Nevertheless, Bretherton (2011) notes the existence of a 'labour market undertow', where labour market movements for some groups seem to occur under the surface and counter to apparent visible trends. Such undertows can move certain individuals and groups further and further away from labour market entry unless significant, relevant and timely assistance is rendered, typically by labour market intermediaries (Bretherton 2011). Intermediaries include career development professionals. In addition, Bretherton (2011) notes

that all labour market barriers are characterised by two categories or preconditions: information asymmetry or a compromised state of labour market readiness⁹.

Information asymmetry exists for everyone; no individual has perfect information with which to make decisions, but asymmetry is said to have the most impact for disadvantaged groups and extends to both job information and training requirements (Bretherton 2011). These groups also suffer from a compromised state of labour market readiness in that – in comparison with many others – they may lack marketable skills and the personal attributes necessary to gain and sustain work. Bretherton points out that ‘seeker’ (i.e. job-seeker) readiness is the area in which most career development effort has been concentrated. However, she believes that it is actually the less recognised notion of market readiness which affects the disadvantaged and their ability to maintain employment.

Market readiness is compromised by discrimination and other factors which affect the willingness of potential employers to look at all alternative sources of labour. Ageism and valuing qualifications rather than skills are examples of ways in which employers can compromise their labour choices. According to Bretherton, those involved in career development need to do more than work with job-seekers: they should also work actively with employers to negotiate partnerships between and among schools, training providers, business and industry, parents and families and community groups. However, other commentators (Halliday-Wynes, Beddie & Saunders 2008; Beddie, Lorey & Pamphilon 2005) argue that there needs to be a separation between the two roles: ‘career guidance’, which focuses on providing individuals with services and resources to make informed education, training and occupational choices; and ‘employment brokerage’, which focuses on placing people in jobs.

Moving to a system of individual entitlement

Skills Australia (2011) and others have advocated a student-led entitlement funding approach, promoting greater contestability between providers. Such an approach has already been introduced in Victoria, and is being implemented in South Australia and progressively in other states. The funding models will affect what ‘pathways’ are used, and also affect – or even distort – the career options open to individuals and those who counsel them. For example, Victoria has implemented a funding model based on individual entitlement, which only enables people to enrol in qualifications that are at a higher level than ones they currently hold. In addition, the Council of Australian Government’s (COAG) National Education Agreement (2008) has put forward education targets for young people. These include lifting the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate to 90% by 2020 and increasing the participation, achievement and outcomes for Indigenous students across various domains. In particular, COAG agreed to the rapid implementation of a Compact with Young Australians, including that:

- Young people aged 15–19 years will have an entitlement to an education or training place for any government-subsidised qualification, subject to admission requirements and course availability.
- Young people aged 20–24 years will have an entitlement to an education or training place for any government-subsidised qualification which would result in the individual attaining a higher qualification, subject to admission requirements and course availability (COAG 2009).

These approaches may support up-skilling at the expense of skill broadening through undertaking further qualifications at the same level. It also does not allow options for study at a lower level, even though these may be of benefit and meet individual career aspirations and interests. Skills Australia (2011) noted that:

There was quite a negative reaction in consultations and submissions to the principle of funding only the first qualification at a particular level as a means of rationing or prioritising the targeting of public funding. Many remarked that an entitlement funding model should not ‘have the effect of denying access

⁹ These refer to the relative lack of access to the information and the skills and personal attributes required to gain employment.

to publicly funded training for those looking to re-enter the workforce, change career, or develop new skills by virtue of the fact they have existing qualifications at that same level' (Skills Australia 2011, p.39).

Skills Australia (2011) proposes that an entitlement to a fully subsidised place should not be exhausted by individuals undertaking more than one course, or part of a course, at these levels. An increase in employment participation requires a comprehensive approach to career development. In fact, sustainable employment might be achieved through completing just elements of a program, especially for many older people with a body of existing skills, qualifications and experience. Thus, as the OECD suggests (OECD 2004) there may be value in having input from career development professionals when designing training programs and qualifications because of their understanding of career pathways.

Whatever arrangements are in place, students need to make well-informed choices when 'spending' their entitlement. In terms of an economic argument, the taxpayer should feel confident that the system in place ensures that such entitlements are well spent. And that the choices individuals make are sufficiently informed to impact positively on retention and completion rates.

These reforms have significant implications for career development professionals and the services they and their organisations provide and the need for an increased access and availability of career service provision. Nevertheless, it will be as important as ever to try to get people started on the right pathway to study and work. This means that career advice should be available as a precursor to enrolment and throughout the course. But the system must acknowledge that people do not always have linear lives. It must have the flexibility to allow people to retrain, and where warranted, with the assistance of public funding. And for those disadvantaged groups who have access to other support, it is important that the services to which they are exposed are arranged in ways that enable them to navigate the system and map out a pathway so that they can access the right programs at the right time and with the right support.

Linking employment to individuals' qualifications, skills and skill levels

Data shows that there is a loose link between the formal training undertaken and destination occupations for the majority of courses. It therefore appears that the view of VET courses as occupationally specific is appropriate only for a few cases (Karmel, Mlotkowski & Awodeyi 2008). As has already been noted (OECD 2004) if good career development is not available, this can lead to poor employment choices and a miss match between skills required and the skills people have. This is supported by Australian work by Mavromaras, McGuinness, Richardson, Sloane & Wei (2011) who examined the satisfaction of individuals who find themselves in a job where they feel their qualifications (over-educated) or skills (over-skilled) or both are greater than are required to do their work. They found that, irrespective of the type of post-school qualification, becoming mismatched in a job almost always results in lower job satisfaction, especially with the actual work that is done. This is particularly the case for those with vocational qualifications. However they also found that, by comparison with workers with no post-school qualifications or with university qualifications, those with vocational qualifications at the certificate III or IV level are less likely to experience overskilling, and if they do, suffer fewer adverse consequences, such as periods of unemployment. What is clear is that it is likely that career development services should assist better matches being achieved.

The shift to lifelong and life wide learning

Current policy from many European countries is focused on moving towards lifelong learning. In Scotland, for example, this shift is evident in the statement from their framework for career information, advice and guidance:

We must therefore enable more people to help themselves, exploit to the full technologies that most of us now take for granted, and provide more and better support for those that need it most (Scottish Government 2011, p.8).

In Australia there is also a move towards lifelong learning and an emphasis on individuals developing the necessary skills for good career management.

The OECD has also emphasised the role for career development in promoting and supporting the idea of lifelong learning and highlighted the link between good career development and an individual's career management skills (OECD 2004). People now need the skills to manage their own education and employment, and in order to do this the opportunity for meaningful career development is essential. People must be able to access services throughout their life. In fact, career services may even be better targeted at adults than youth, for whom it can be expected there will be a time of 'experimentation' and that chance rather than planning may play a bigger part in putting them on their first career trajectory.

In a forthcoming book of research readings on older workers (Griffin & Beddie eds.) van Loo (forthcoming) points out that that responsibility for career development now rests very much with the individual. The changing world of work, changing career patterns and the need for longer working lives requires an expanding role for those who provide guidance and counselling for adults. The traditional focus of guidance in terms of occupational and educational choice is supplemented by a need for career guidance during working life which facilitates career success, job mobility and continuous skills updating. As he notes:

Currently, guidance and counselling services are the responsibility of many different stakeholders in the labour market – with little coordination – which contributes to the scattered nature of these services. This makes it difficult to provide counselling services in line with more dynamic careers that are characterised by regular changes and spells of up- and re-skilling, induced by changing job requirements. A book on challenges for guidance and counselling in Europe (CEDEFOP forthcoming) shows that successful modern guidance services comprise much more than directing people to a particular training course; they involve an assessment of skills and learning needs, including, where required, a recognition of prior learning or experience, a process of selecting and tailoring different training options according to clients' needs, a strong focus on long-time career concerns, and support to assist people to become more self-managing, if needed (van Loo forthcoming).

The *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* has been developed by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs and is very much focused on building the self-management skills of individuals (MCEECDYA 2008). The stated purpose is to provide a framework that can be used to design, implement and evaluate career development interventions for young people and adults. This is, in part, a response to the need for a national framework highlighted by the report *Footprints to the Future* (2001) and the OECD *Review of Career Guidance Policies Australia Country Note* (2002).

At its core, the Blueprint identifies the skills, attitudes and knowledge that individuals need to effectively manage their life, learning and work roles in the 21st century (MCEECDYA 2008). The eleven skills, or competencies, that are deemed necessary for people to manage their careers successfully are:

- Build and maintain a positive self-concept.
- Interact positively and effectively with others.
- Change and grow throughout life.
- Participate in lifelong learning supportive of career goals.
- Locate and effectively use career information.
- Understand the relationship between work, society and the economy.
- Secure/create and maintain work.
- Make career-enhancing decisions.
- Maintain balanced life and work roles.
- Understand the changing nature of life and work roles.
- Understand, engage in and manage the career-building process.

Skills Australia (2011) noted that, in the VET sector, career development services are relatively limited and often absorbed into general student counselling services. There is also a wide variance across the many providers and state and territory programs. Therefore, it is important that career self-management skills become either embedded as an element of VET training programs, or be learnt in parallel with them. They then become part of an individual's armoury of employability skills. This requires an 'active' employment services model – one that adjusts individual resources and characteristics to changing work environments and occupational and industry drivers. We will look at the ideal characteristics of a career development and information model in the next section.

What makes for good career development?

...self-knowledge and career exploration and an interactive and integrated method of delivery, are key to sound career decision-making (Richard 2005, p. 189).

The key elements of a comprehensive career development and information system

Many have argued that career guidance must be lifelong, accessible and meaningful for all individuals (Halliday-Wynes, Beddie & Saunders 2008; Harris, Rainey & Sumner 2006). More recently, the Scottish Government has developed a framework to support service delivery of career information, advice and guidance. They highlight seven points which ensure that the service provided meets the required standard. These are:

- Independent – respects the freedom to the career choice and personal development of the individual.
- High quality – should be up-to-date, accurate and consistent, enabling people to make fully informed, confident choices.
- Impartial – it is in accordance with the person's interests and is not influenced by provider, institutional or funding interests.
- Informed – should be based on a detailed knowledge of the changing labour and learning markets and emerging opportunities for career development.
- Supportive of equal opportunities – will promote equality.
- Confidential – individual's right to privacy in terms of their personal information and to know with whom, and to what end, it will be shared will be balanced with the need to share information in appropriate circumstances.
- Holistic – individual need and circumstances will be taken into account, with career information and guidance forming part of a wider package of support where appropriate (Scottish Government 2011).

A high quality career development service needs to be available throughout a person's working life to help support informed decision-making and raise aspirations. Also important are the means of access. More and more, governments are recognising that alternative ways of providing information are essential, especially where there are groups that need greater levels of support than others. Moving to a more cost-effective and sustainable delivery model means developing more services where individuals can find the information themselves, through online resources, telephone services, mobile text messaging and other examples of low-cost, effective information transfer. This allows the more intensive and costly services (such as case management) to be used for the groups who are at greater risk and may not engage with career information themselves.

Raising aspirations is a vital and necessary aspect of tackling some of the most difficult social problems such as entrenched unemployment, underemployment, poverty and disadvantage. Access to good career development is a significant aspect of raising aspirations and can encourage people to explore and challenge stereotypes and long-held ideas about work. Good advice can inspire choices that were not previously considered, or were thought out of reach, helping break the cycle of poverty and disengagement, and thus improve the nation's use of its human capital.

Grierson et al. (2002) found that guidance and counselling can help make the process of access to training and employment more equitable and more efficient. They suggest that:

Guidance and counselling work best and are most efficient when they can focus on two things: first, matching learners with training opportunities that reflect current local market demand and second, facilitating the final steps in the transition from learning to work (Grierson et al. 2002, p.88).

Evidence of the effects of career development

Bernes et al. (2007) argue that:

In order to move the profession forward by promoting the benefits of career counselling, influencing policy change, expanding career services to include more diverse populations, improving counsellor training, improving intervention methods, and developing quality resources, the field of career guidance and counselling needs outcome research that demonstrates its effectiveness on personal, familial, social, educational, economic, financial, national, and international levels (Bernes et al. 2007, pp. 88).

Research examining career development programs has found that, within a single intervention, a combination of components seems to be more valuable than just focusing on one (Brown et al. 2000). These can be broken down into further sub-components, which are:

Written exercises; direct, individually focussed interpretations of self-appraisal information, career planning activities, decision-making strategies; practical, up-to-date career and occupational information; modelling and exposing clients to individuals who have attained success and can demonstrate career exploration, decision-making and implementation; helping clients build support networks (Brown et al. 2000, p. 732).

Other research from Bimrose, Barnes & Hughes (2005) also examines the nature of effective guidance using a longitudinal study. This research was carried out from 2002 to 2008 and was funded by the UK Department for Education and Skills, Access to Learning Division. Findings suggest that the strategies and skills used by practitioners could be organised into four broad categories of activities, with 40 subsets. The four broad activities were: building a working alliance; exploring potential; identifying options and strategies; and ending and following through (Bimrose & Barnes 2006).

Good practice indicates that guidance is useful to clients in supporting their transitions into and through professional learning and development when it: provides challenge and direction; gives access to relevant resources; can be accessed over a period of time; brings about positive change(s); and provides support and safety (Bimrose, Barnes & Hughes 2005). These results also seemed to be long lasting, with 78% of the clients followed up after 12 months saying they felt that guidance had resulted in direct and positive change and 31% believing guidance had resulted in indirect positive change.

The importance of links between employers and individuals

The National Fund for Workforce Solutions (NFWS) has specified four principles needed to successfully engage and develop connections between employers and employees and to help meet the skills needs of both these groups¹⁰. The four principles are: to establish collaborative regional funding groups who share the strategic vision of developing the workforce, support workforce partnerships that meet the needs of both employers and employees, promote career advancement for all employees, and, support a comprehensive, easily navigated workforce development system. The NFWS suggests using career pathways education and training programs to promote career advancement for all workers, especially low-wage workers and job-seekers (see Skills Australia 2010, p.89). Underlying these principles the needs of both employers and employees for suitable and relevant employment is essential¹¹. Also, it is important to provide a suitable career track for individuals and getting them on this track.

A final element is whether the advice that people receive is relevant. Is it actually tailored to their aspirations, achievements and abilities at that time, or restricted to the range of pathways familiar to the advisor or more likely to serve the interests of others?

As Skills Australia note:

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) stressed that information should be backed up with advice and guidance on career and learning opportunities, through high-quality labour market intelligence and the use of information and communication technology to make quality information readily accessible so that students can make informed choices. This is an approach we strongly endorse (Skills Australia 2011, p.98).

This is particularly important because Halliday-Wynes, Beddie and Saunders (2008) suggest that many students' aspirations do not match their labour market opportunities and perhaps their abilities.

Groups that may need more intensive support

The government has indicated that it is focusing on groups that are disadvantaged and missing out on the benefits associated with employment. Groups may need more intensive support to access and gain the benefits include:

- unemployed and long-term unemployed people, redundant workers or people returning to work
- Indigenous people who are disengaged from the workforce or learning
- people with a disability, and
- young people at risk of leaving school early, or those who have already left.

Well-organised career services are particularly important for many disadvantaged groups such as Indigenous youth, CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse), people from low socio-economic status households and newly arrived refugees. A recent report found that:

They can help to address the information deficits that act as barriers to accessing learning, thus helping to address equity concerns and to maximise the use of human talent. Well organised career development services can be a significant way to help overcome the lack of social capital (Sweet et al 2010, p. 3).

¹⁰ The National Fund for Workforce Solutions is a public-private collaboration in the United States and was formed to address development challenges in the regional workforce.

¹¹ An example of some of the problems with finding someone a job that is not suitable for either the employer or employee is finding an alcoholic a bartender's position.

As already discussed, Bretherton (2011) highlighted the two categories or preconditions for labour market barriers: information asymmetry and a compromised state of labour market readiness. Often groups that need more intensive support are experiencing both. Intensive support can help individuals overcome information asymmetry by providing accurate, up-to-date information in a service delivery model which uses case management. Wrap-around services that support each individual and focus on their needs will help them to overcome barriers and develop the skills necessary to actively engage in the workforce. Some identified barriers in this category are childcare needs, financial constraints, health-related issues, local labour market conditions (Bimrose & Barnes 2006) and time (Pocock, Skinner, McMahon & Pritchard 2011).

Unemployed, redundant workers or people returning to work

For a range of reasons it is important that individuals have lifelong access to career development. Due to the changing nature of work, many individuals find themselves lacking the appropriate skills and knowledge to transfer to other jobs; in some cases, they disengage from work altogether¹². Others may find that they are no longer able to do the hard manual labour required by their occupation – either because of injury or age – and so must re-skill or find new suitable employment. Beddie, Lorey and Pamphilon (2005) recommend that:

Career development for disengaged adults is best when it is community-based, affordable, and impartial (that is, one step removed from agencies offering other assistance, such as welfare, job matching or training) (p. 6).

Another key point is timing. Beddie, Lorey and Pamphilon (2005) suggest that adults who disengage from the workforce may not have access to career development advice through their regular points of contact (for example, Centrelink, libraries, or community centres). In these cases, providing advice to them during VET training may have better outcomes.

Indigenous people who are disengaged from learning or work

Career development programs for Indigenous students should take account of cultural differences. Hartung (2005) suggests that theoretical concepts and models of career services are useful only if they relate meaningfully to the culture in which they are delivered. Part of this understanding comes from:

...guidance counsellors respecting and affirming the cultural identity of Indigenous clients, and the need to be aware of how cultural factors such as language, social structures, value systems and identity impinge on career decision making. He emphasizes that this takes time, planning and continued effort in partnership with Indigenous students and their communities (Crump 2001, p. 21).

Helme (2009) suggests that good career development for Indigenous people needs to include: a supportive institutional culture; good relationships with Indigenous families; case management/mentoring for all Indigenous students; timely information and support in gaining financial assistance for education and training costs; and workplace learning.

A final point— but a very important one — is that:

...career services that simply match those available to non-Indigenous people may only serve to perpetuate Indigenous disadvantage, and that a different approach to career development is needed to close the gaps (Chesters et al. 2009).

¹² Changes in industries such as the decline in manufacturing or increase of the service industries are examples that can lead to a need for different skills and displace workers.

People with a disability

Polidano and Mavromaras (2010) have recently undertaken a study of HILDA data¹³ to consider the role of VET in the labour market outcomes of people with disabilities. They found that while people with a disability find it considerably harder to retain employment, VET completion strongly improves their chances of getting and keeping a job. This suggests that helping people with a disability get a 'first job' is likely to reduce the scarring effect that being out of work has on future employment prospects. In light of these findings, there is good reason for career development professionals to take into account the opportunities presented by VET courses when advising people with a disability. It should be noted that type of disability from which a person suffers can affect the likelihood of their completion, with attrition from VET courses highest for those with mental illness. Multiple disabilities compound this problem, and may complicate accessing an appropriate range of support services.

For people with a disability, support and access to appropriate information is also important. To enable people with a disability to engage and complete training adequate support is needed. However, in order to access support people with a disability need to disclose they have a disability and many are reluctant to do this for various reasons. Research suggests that, in periods of transition, people with a disability may have problems accessing suitable information. Barnett (2004) found a lack of user-friendly and accessible information about the VET system and poor career development made it difficult for students or potential students to make informed choices. One final point is made by Clark (2007), who suggests that the attitudes of people providing career information may be a barrier to receiving suitable information. Clark found that there is a general perception in the community and among career professionals that people with hearing loss (irrespective of the degree) are unable to pursue a range of employment opportunities (2007). These types of attitudes may also affect people with other types of disabilities.

Young people at risk

Young people are the first point at which access to good career development is essential. Research suggests the concept of career development should be integrated within the curriculum and include programs that offer students access to people in the workforce. This gives young people a context for the world of work and helps them develop lifelong skills to manage their own career pathway and make informed choices about future work and study. Parents and other significant people (such as teachers) also need to have the right information, because young people often turn to them for advice (Scottish Government 2011; Hughes & Thomas 2003).

Pathway planning and career guidance can help young learners to understand the links between education and employment, as well as providing support and keeping them engaged with learning. Partnerships between schools and other service providers can also assist students at risk during transition by providing better pastoral care for students and a shared responsibility. Hillman (2010) suggests that a crucial factor in the success of low-performing school students is having a solid plan for their future to keep them on track.

The key features of a good career development system for young people are:

- Career development should be integrated throughout an individual's schooling, with a focus on building the necessary lifelong skills to help them effectively manage their career.
- Young people especially need to experience different types of work and understand themselves in terms of interests, skills, strengths and weaknesses.
- Understanding the link between skills and work can help build the aspirations of young people as well as allowing teachers to develop exciting and relevant learning experiences.

¹³ The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey is a household-based panel study which began in 2001. It collects information about economic and subjective well-being, labour market dynamics and family dynamics.

- Towards the end of school there needs to be more intensive support for young people, teachers and parents to help young people make good choices.
- There should also be the capability to track and monitor young people in order to best support them.
- Independent, high quality, accessible advice should be available to young people at all times.

A report for the Equality and Human Rights Commission in the United Kingdom was commissioned to understand the equality impact of career, information, advice and guidance on policy and practice for young people up to the age of 16 and how this effects their destinations (Hutchinson et al. 2011). This report found that young people were not a homogenous group, but rather a series of different groups with differing and distinctive needs in relation to career guidance services. Some of the differences that impacted on young peoples views of occupations and possible careers included:

- gender differences – which are influenced by family and friends, the media and result in gendered ideas of particular occupations.
- young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) – who may experience low aspirations and expectations and need ongoing targeted advice and support.
- teenage mothers¹⁴ – who may have low aspirations and engagement in education prior to pregnancy and need support to overcome barriers to continuing education, which include prior negative experiences at school and the need for childcare.

¹⁴ Teenage mothers have been targeted in the recent Federal budget as needing extra assistance to engage with education or employment.

What is needed and what could be done better: ways forward

The previous section considers what makes for good career development and information services, and draws from both Australian and international literature. Throughout the paper we have also considered some of the attributes and areas in which career development effort should be concentrated in the short to medium term.

The ways forward include the development of:

- **career management skills as a fundamental employability skill for all individuals:** The current set of employability skills are more oriented to enterprise and industry needs for generic skills. However, the move to a more individual focus for funding training suggests that training packages and accredited programs should now have units of competency or components within other units which recognise and foster this key career management skill. In fact, the background paper on the Employability Skills and Attributes Framework (Ithaca Group 2011) proposes a skill area focussed on ‘managing yourself in the world of work’ and has as one of its elements directing and managing your career and work life. We suggest this proposed skill area and element should be incorporated in the final framework, if nothing else because of the increased focus on individual entitlement.
- **well-integrated, well-publicised, high quality, comprehensive, readily useable and accessible career information:** Career development professionals need to be able to access this more widely and so does the general public. This includes improved access to information and the development of more flexible methods of delivering and sourcing it, including using existing facilities such as community organisations and libraries. It involves using traditional print and a wide range of ICT such as websites and their associated links, mobile text messaging and social networking, call centres and face-to-face services which are group or individually based, including mentoring. This needs to be complemented by effective systems through which individuals can readily document information relevant to their career and its progress, such as e-portfolios.

Of particular importance to the VET sector is good information. This enables potential students to make some judgments about the quality of courses and support services which a provider has, or can access, including career advice services. Skills Australia (2011) has advocated publishing information on the *MySkills* website about the student services, including career advice services, provided by all registered training organisations.

- **a cascading level of service delivery:** This gives all people access to a level of service that meets their particular needs, with the most intensive and comprehensive services being available for those with the greatest need. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, and so a mix-and-match approach is required so that individuals, and those advising them, can have ready access to the level of information and services needed.
- **career development services that are targeted at the most vulnerable ‘at risk’ groups:** These have been outlined in the first section of this paper, and the most recent federal budget initiatives are focused on key subgroups within them. These groups include young people at risk, unemployed adults and older adults. The federal budget’s concentration on key groups within these broader categories – including single parents, teenage parents and jobless families – is welcomed. However we would suggest

that the following groups need to be added to this mix: refugees, NEET, people with a disability and adults looking to re-skill due to shifting skills needs or injury.

The disadvantaged are also most susceptible to information asymmetry and a lack of key employability and other foundational skills, and program design and funding levels need to reflect that. However, the greatest challenge is faced by those who provide career and other advice to individuals and groups who may lose access to benefits if they do not participate in programs. These are the groups who are most difficult to help as they may feel that they are being compelled rather than helped.

- **genuine and comprehensive wrap-around services, with career development as a central focus:** We have argued that many need access to information and services beyond career advice and counselling (which the Ithaca Group [2011] refer to as enabling factors or services). However, it is effective career information and advice that provides purposeful goals for individuals and motivates them to access the right VET programs. This approach is in accord with that proposed by both NVEAC and Skills Australia. Nevertheless, the present service arrangements are seen by many as fragmented and poorly targeted. There is also an uneven distribution of services and resources and gaps in provision, with some organisations (including some VET providers) seeing such services as peripheral to their core business. As Skills Australia (2011) suggests, the programs need to be rationalised and better integrated. Funding approaches and levels need to be examined to ensure effective service delivery. Greater flexibility in program guidelines, target groups and funding arrangements is also required to ensure that the programs have the maximum possible impact. This means they need to have effective and meaningful performance indicators.
- **better approaches to sharing resources and expertise, especially through more effective networks and partnerships:** A natural consequence of developing comprehensive wrap-around services should be that effective networks and partnerships are developed. CICA provides a focus and network for those concerned with career information and development, and so it is important that – as a council – it provides effective networking opportunities for its members. It is also important that it develops effective partnerships with other associations and organisations concerned with the effective delivery of all manner of other wrap-around services. The same applies at the level of organisations providing services: in order to be most effective, they must be comprehensively connected in a range of networks and partnerships so that they can serve the best interests of their clients.
- **appropriate initial and ongoing training and professional development for career development professionals and others:** A recent Scottish Government report suggests that career development is a distinct, defined and specialist profession and has a core set of unique skills. They argue it is necessary to have high quality, relevant, professional training and development in order to support a high quality system of career development (Scottish Government 2011). CICA has been active in this area, by endorsing course providers that meet CICA's Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners. Career development professionals also need access to ongoing and effective professional development, both formal and informal.

In addition, these professionals have a role in providing professional development or support for those with influencing roles. However, arguably, there is also a place for creating a career development skill set for VET teachers and trainers¹⁵. This could become part of the new VET diploma program developed by Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA, the relevant Industry Skills Council), or incorporated as part of teacher and trainer offerings by the higher education sector.

¹⁵ In fact, the TAE10 Training Package supports the use of three optional imported units of competence focused on career development services drawn from the Business Services Training Package (BSB07): BSBLED707A, BSBLED708A & BSBLED709A: Establish career development services, (707A) Conduct a career development session (708A) & Identify and communicate trends in career development (709A)

Moving forward also involves:

- better career counselling at or around enrolment for VET programs, and throughout the course: While career counselling and other support services should be readily available and, hopefully, used, there is a particular need to focus attention at enrolment, or before enrolment decisions are made. This is needed to ensure that individuals are making the most appropriate choice of program from those available, and to reduce the amount of program churn and drop out. However, courses and other concurrent circumstances can also challenge the choices people make, and so access to on-going advice throughout the course is important too.
- an increased focus on employers and their role in the career development process: There is a tendency for career developers and others to concentrate attention on career seekers at the expense of other key groups, particularly potential employers. Joint planning and service delivery with the input from employers is highlighted in the Scottish framework as vital for good career development. Partnerships with skills councils and other organisations that are responsible for distilling information about the skills needs of employers and compiling this into user friendly, fit-for-purpose labour market information are also essential (Scottish Government 2011). This allows employers and individuals to understand the changing nature of work and how they can take advantage of the emerging opportunities or address skill needs. There is an important and potentially growing role for career development professionals to work more closely with enterprises to ensure that they can be made more ready to absorb potential labour, and particularly that drawn from disadvantaged groups (Bretherton 2011).
- better evaluation of quality and impact of the services: There is little regular systematic evaluation of the quality of career development provision, and little actual evidence of the effectiveness of career development services (WIER 2005; Hutchinson et al. 2011). This affects the ability to develop effective policy. The need for better data, performance indicators and evaluation is supported in a range of studies. For example:

Evaluation ensures that services are comprehensive and quality driven...Conducting evaluations should not be viewed as an isolated activity, for it should be seen as a continual process that complements program services (Whiston & Buck 2008, pp.677 & 690).

And,

Enhanced data collection on career development services will also play an important role in designing, planning and implementing improved services in the future (Halliday-Wynes, Beddie & Saunders 2008, p.1)

In conclusion, access to good career guidance and professionals is increasingly important for VET's client base, as are developing their individual career management skills. This is particularly so as a number of those who undertake VET programs are amongst the more disadvantaged in the community. As The Rev Tim Costello once remarked at a VET managers' conference, the VET system and its staff are 'purveyors of hope'. The best possible career development services can help turn hope to reality.

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Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA)

Unit 3, 192B Burwood Road
Hawthorn VIC 3122
Website: www.cica.org.au
Email: info@cica.org.au



National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd

Level 11, 33 King William Street, Adelaide, South Australia
PO Box 8288, Station Arcade, SA 5000 Australia
Telephone +61 8 8230 8400 Facsimile +61 8 8212 3436
Website www.ncver.edu.au Email ncver@ncver.edu.au