

6 December 2019

Honorable Dan Tehan
Education Council Chair and Federal Minister for Education
PO Box 202
Carlton South
Victoria 3053 Australia

To the Honorable Dan Tehan,

Re: Review of Senior Secondary Pathways

As South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People, under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* (the Act) I am mandated to promote and protect the rights, interests and wellbeing of all South Australian children and young people (birth to 18 years). It is also my role to ensure that the government satisfies its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This extends to the State at all levels of government.

Since commencing in this role, I have spoken with thousands of children and young people on a wide range of issues that are important to them. Repeatedly children and young people have discussed with me the pressures and challenges in going from education to work. This has been something that I have heard about in a wide range of settings from regional towns to metropolitan schools.

These conversations led me to commence a project on the transitions from education to work. A key focus of this has been identifying barriers, challenges and how to better support and inspire children and young people. As I am sure you are aware in the context of changes to the nature of work and the impact of future technology; it is imperative that children and young people are being better prepared today.

I have heard from a wide range of stakeholders including business and industry leaders, careers coordinators and of course, young people themselves. The findings from my project will be released shortly and are relevant to this current consultation.

In light of this, I have provided the following feedback on the basis of some of my recent engagement with children and young people on future job readiness and what they have said is important to them.

Yours Sincerely,



Helen Connolly

Commissioner for Children and young people
Children and Young People's perspectives on Future Job Readiness

The office for the Commissioner for Children and Young People surveyed 779 young people, aged 9 to 22 as part of our engagement with children and young people on future job readiness.

The survey was based on young people's aspirations, their perceptions of the jobs of the future and the skills and preparations that they think they will need.

The results highlight that whilst some young people feel equipped to tackle the jobs of the future the majority don't. Despite a growth in the variety of jobs available, many young people are still not aware of the options available or what this means for them. On a personal level this can affect personal engagement and aspiration and ultimately has implications for workforce diversity.

"There is so much scope for change, and that needs to come quickly if we are to keep up with the changing world around us." (Male, 14 Years)

The findings also point to evidence of a disconnect between systems of employment and systems of education. This disconnect is particularly relevant for young people who do not necessarily know exactly what they want to do, but are making choices in regards to the future. It is these choices that can later hold implications for them in their transition from school into the workforce or further study and how accessible options are to them.

Knowledge of jobs and the future

Many young people do not feel well enough informed or prepared. Nearly a quarter of the young people that were surveyed reported feeling that they know 'not much' or 'nothing at all' about what jobs are available.

The knowledge of which jobs are available is important to the aspirations that children and young people develop for themselves.¹ This can flow onto young people's perceptions of what is possible, how they apply their interests and skills and engagement in their own learning.

This was supported by attitudes of survey respondents. Those that knew more about the availability of jobs were conversely more likely to be aware of the skills that they needed for the jobs that interested them. The same group was also more likely to be positive that they were learning skills in school necessary for their future. Consequently, if young people can see what options are available to them, they are more likely to find something that matches their interests, be in a position to apply this to their education and learn the skills required by industry in that field.

Knowing more about the different types of jobs that are available was some of the most sought after information from respondents. Interestingly younger respondents were most likely to want to know more about the different types of jobs available, with older respondents being more interested in the application of interests and skills to these jobs.

This suggests that the current approach to careers exploration in school may in fact be occurring too late and that for many young people this needs to occur earlier. This would allow

¹See: K. Torii (2018). Connecting the worlds of learning and work: Prioritising school-industry partnerships in Australia's education system, Mitchell Institute, Melbourne.

career exploration to commence in earlier years, giving older students time to focus on the areas that are most important to them, such as better aligning their interests.

Young people had many ideas about how exploring careers and jobs could occur better in schools:

“Do more than just plp. Actually teach you about the variety of jobs and upcoming jobs”
(Female, 16 Years)

“By having day excursions to experience a day in the life” (Female, 14 Years)

“More education from a younger age, as well as having more variety for subject selection from the onset of high school, not just senior school.” (Male, 14 Years)

“By talking to industry representatives about their lived experience or through more open and multiple work experience placements.” (Female, 17 Years)

“Experiencing them, hearing from people in those careers. Website/app with all the resources in one instead of finding them out all over the place.” (Female, 16 Years)

“A presentation or through a one on one discussion with someone who knows a lot about careers and study for my future. Not one of my teachers.” (Female, 17 Years)

“More seminars in-house at schools with professionals speaking to us about the future workforce and what skills we need to succeed in this modern 21st Century competitive world environment.” (Male, 14 Years)

“a website that isn't directed to uni students. like if i wanted to research the process of being a cop i'd like to find the best ways to prepare myself at a young age” (Female, 14 Years)

* the PLP is the Personal Learning Plan, a South Australian Education Certificate subject completed in year 10 that allows children and young people to prepare for subject choices.

Matching job awareness and individual interests

Children and young people overwhelmingly reported that they don't want to just know about jobs, but want to know which jobs match their interest and their skills. This was the number one 'ask' across age groups and genders. It highlights that despite the growing breadth of jobs in the workforce many young people do not know what careers best align with their interests.

Matching interests with jobs is a priority for children and young people in preparing for future work and was the number one thing that survey respondents said made a job or career pathway interesting.

Currently young people are mostly left on their own to explore what they are interested in. The different avenues open to young people to explore their interests can be highly variable and rarely relate to the individual. Additionally, information is often fragmented, outdated or ignores the changes occurring in the world of work. These factors can diminish its reliability and value.

“Counsel students and give advice on what jobs they think would suit the student's abilities and personality. Not the general assemblies that we get that apply to everyone and really got me nowhere.” (Female, 18 Years)

Many young people are left to try to explore what things could match their interests on their own. In schools, there is limited guidance from careers counsellors and limited opportunities to actually explore careers. This leaves young people having to find information online or from more variable sources such as friends and guardians.

Accessing information

Children and young people want to be able to find and access information easily, but also be able to explore this in detail both online and offline. Many young people talked about having the ability to talk through things with someone. Whether that was a career advisor if they are exploring their interests, or an industry professional if they wanted to hear more about a job or field.

There are a number of websites available to young people that allow them to explore jobs and careers broadly as well as find how this fits with their interests. However many of these sites seriously lack an engaging user experience and a connection to their audience. There is a limited ability to access personalised results, or when narrowing down interests, forcing the user to make binary choices that are not reflective of the real world and possible contrasts.

Poor linkages and other design issues also mean that rather than being able to ‘click through’ and ‘explore’ a job and how it relates to an interest, information is dispersed. Often this includes things such as the study, skills or experience that typical work in that field requires, job security, course information and where jobs are located.

Not all children and young people have the same experience of career guidance in school. While some schools have career nights, guest speakers or careers advisors who have the time to assist them, there is a significant variance between schools and the information children and young people can receive. Research conducted by this office through a call out to 70 schools in South Australia found that schools often held the opinion that careers guidance was getting in the way of academic priorities such as ATAR that were expected to be promoted.

Children and young people however have said that accessing careers information is important in helping them to make informed choices. And that there are ways education could improve how it helps prepare them for the jobs that they are interested in:

“Information that is clear, concise, and accessible (preferably online). It would also be helpful if the information was organised, so it is easier to sort through different types of information and to more easily locate relevant information.” (Female, 16 Years)

“maybe a more personalised program?? or just stuff that helps us with learning how to work out in the big wide adult world” (Male, 14 Years)

“have more guest speakers and match them to the students interests” (Female, 16 Years)

“More information about what specific things to work on in yourself to improve. Especially better subject selection information! It took me ages to figure out what subjects I had to do - the uni websites can be pretty confusing if you're not familiar with them.” (Female, 16 Years)

“Give more subject counselling so I know what classes to take.” (Male, 13 Years)

Skills for future work and for life

Only one third of Young People feel that they are learning skills in school that are relevant to their future. Young people are aware of the importance of learning the skills required for life and for the workforce. While some children and young people feel prepared with the right skills for their lives, future jobs and knowing what direction that they would like to go after school - others do not feel as prepared.

While many children and young people appreciate the need to have good maths and English skills, these are the skills that children and young people are most confident in. Young people are least confident that they are ready for life, know what they want to do next and have the right skills and learnings from school. This highlights that whilst there is a strong focus within schools on preparing young people for life, further study and work, many young people are not confident in this preparation.

“School has only stressed me by saying 'You have no life skills, learn' then telling me I'm bad for not learning..” (Female, 16 Years)

Those that felt they were not learning skills for the future at school, were most likely to discuss practical skills such as budgeting, managing taxes and social skills such as being confident and communicating. Additionally, while many young people felt confident in their ability to have intrinsically human skills regarded as essential for the future (creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial skills), a fifth of young people were not so confident that they had these skills.

Over three quarters of children and young people had ideas about how schools could help better prepare them for future jobs. Many of these ideas related to better matching their interests and skills and ways in which they could learn more about careers. However many also related to concerns they had about the skills that they were learning or not learning in school.

If we are to better prepare children and young people for the future there is a need to raise their confidence in these skills and broaden these to other key human skills that young people feel they are lacking such as problem solving, team work and communication.

*“Being a well rounded person with good relationship and communication skills”
(Female, 15 Years)*

“knowing how to do money management, and generally things that adults need to do everyday to succeed” (Female, 14 Years)

“how to be an active member of society. How to behave in the workplace. basic life skills such as how to get a car, house, different insurances. life safety skills such as CPR. and other basic necessities needed after high school.” (Male, 17 Years)

“As much as people don't like to hear about modern/current politics, I think we need to be learning way more about it.” (Male, 16 Years)

“Respect, Honesty, Resilience, Responsibility, Problem-solving skills, first-aid, social skills.” (Male, 17 Years)

“how to pay taxes, how to cook, how to apply for loans, how to manage time, just small stuff we need and also skills relating the career we want to persue” (Male, 13 Years)

“Mathematics, creativity and problem solving skills” (Female, 14 Years)

“- good english skills as well as financial literacy - being able to communicate politely and with others - solve problems.” (Female, 16 Years)

“Creativity - to be original/a problem solver Communication/Collaboration Not just 'in the future', but in general in the workplace I think everyone needs a level of social intelligence, to be able to have positive relationships with co-workers Knowledge around mental health/self-care/keeping a work-life balance” (Female, 15 Years)

A vision to be supported by Adults

Young people want to be better supported by adults. They don't want to simply be told that future jobs “are still to be imagined” or are “Yet to be created”. They want to know which jobs are at risk of going with future technology and how they can prepare themselves.

*“actually just *telling* us about different jobs in detail instead of being vague and hand-waving it away with "the jobs you will have don't exist yet", which is both disheartening and supremely unhelpful.” (Female, 17 Years)*

Children and young people also want school to better prepare them for life and more broadly to be active members of the community. They want adults to support them with things that society often assumes that they are learning but are essential to participate, such as how to get a driver's license, how to do taxes and how to access information on politics.

These things are just as important for many young people as other core learnings in education. They allow young people to function outside of the school environment, engage maturely with society, and apply themselves with confidence. Factors which overcome many of the concerns that employers have about young people entering the workforce.

Many of the ideas that young people have are simple improvements to the education system and are about making what you are learning in school more real and relevant to life. Their ideas

range from better discussions on subject in school to more opportunities to explore the world of work through speakers, work experience and better counselling.

Young people also felt that they were not being engaged enough in particular subjects or things relevant for the future, whether this was through an over focus on a particular area or that they felt the subject was not relevant to them.

Listening to the views and feedback from children and young people is foundational to improving their outcomes. Simply targeting particular areas such as STEM and English are unlikely to better equip young people with the skills they will need. Further narrow objectives only serve to reinforce the most commonly held view from children and young people, that success at school is academic success.

Some of the feedback from children and young people involves disrupting the traditional “Pathways” mentality in favour of better approaches that are more flexible and allow young people to properly explore. A more favourable approach would incorporate *Ecosystems thinking* which recognises the shared interest that multiple stakeholders have in children and young people’s schooling outcomes and how each entity can better improve this journey and take greater responsibility for the outcomes that it produces.

“we're just conditioned to do the same thing as everyone else did before us...we're not learning anything new/up to date. Our world is continually changing and school barely addresses this. And this is coming from someone who does well in school.” (Female, 17 Years)